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SAM'S SWEETHEART

BY

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'COMIN' THRO' THE RYE,' 'CHERRY RIPE!'

'LAND O' THE LEAL,'

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13 GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1883.

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LONDON
PRINTED BY STRANGEWAYS AND SONS,
Tower Street, Upper St. Martin's Lane.

SAM'S SWEETHEART.

Book I.

SAM.

CHAPTER I.

MISOGAMY CAMP was down on its luck, and had declined in reputation, since its most influential member happening to remark one morning that it was a fine day for a walk, had sauntered towards the Bush, and somehow forgotten to return.

Of course there was no woman in the case. The very name of the camp sufficiently advertised its opinions, while it was

composed almost entirely of men who had either flagrantly ill-used, or been themselves wronged by, the opposite sex (their hatred of it in both cases being identical), and with inflexible sternness had hitherto held itself free of encroachment from either the good or bad specimens of womanhood then in the neighbourhood.

But early one morning, Yankee Bill, stepping briskly out into the open air, detected a something frivolous in the atmosphere that at once suggested the presence of the sex, and, on looking round, discovered it in her emblem—a battered steel crinoline—that suspended by a pole above the shanty lately occupied by a missing member of the community, gave significant hint of the probable cause of his continued absence.

Yankee Bill stood for a few moments in contemplation of this insult to a body of

men who were in the habit of solving most awkward or sarcastic riddles with their revolvers, then went for that crinoline, and never did the charms it might once have contained work direr havoc upon man, than did its steel ribs on the heads and bodies of the surrounding scoffers, to whom the joke was brought home with a practical spirit and humour worthy of the best traditions of the camp.

But that evening, Long Jim, in reference to the alluvial dirt that for the past ten days he had rocked alternately with profanity, patience, and despair, remarked, 'It's got its feelin's; it's only obeying the natural law that the luck always ends where the woman begins—but who *is* the woman?' he added, looking round.

'There ain't one,' said Portland Dick, sententiously. 'Black, white, or brown, there ain't a woman living 'ud keep Cucumber

Jack pinned to her apron ten days. He's got tired of the creek, and taken to bush-ranging, or he's dropped into a richer claim, or shot somebody where folks are scarce enough to be missed; anyway, though the luck may come back, *he* won't.'

An expostulatory 'hem' proceeding from the outside of a barrel, graced by the partner of the missing man, was here taken to express dissent to this opinion; but inquiry only elicited the fact that Sam's throat was dry, 'for want of use,' as Long Jim fiercely remarked.

'*Say* you've never known him stay away as long as this before, Sam?' said Yankee Bill; 'you and he've been hitched up together long enough to sorter know each other's ways by now, I guess.'

'That's so,' said Sam, in his simple, slow way. 'Me and my partner has seen some rain and shine together, and if we haven't

got each other's bearin's by now, why—' he paused and looked beamingly round on the company — 'the sooner we goes in single harness again the better.'

'You're in it now,' said a man, who had just entered; 'leastways it's a queer partnership when one's down Bendigo way and t' other's up here.'

Sam changed colour, and his broad, ruddy face twitched perceptibly, as he removed his pipe and looked anxiously at the new comer.

'Have you heard anything?' he said, 'and I'd a sort of feeling that he was coming home to-night, he stopped away nigh upon as long as this once before.'

'There's a man down Bendigo way,' said the other, deliberately, 'who's either Cucumber Jack, or his double—answers all troublesome questions with his revolver, carries the luck about with him in his

pocket, and goes into the bush every two or three days to see a bee-ootiful creature in colour, a light chocolate brown.'

'That's him!' cried Sam, in visible excitement; 'and so he've took her along with him. And goin' off promiskis like, p'r'aps he forgot his partner; but it won't take long for me to join him,' he added, cheerfully.

'So it *is* a woman!' said Yankee Bill, in a tone of disgust; 'and he the darnedst woman-hater of the lot. Seems like you're pretty well up in each other's secrets, but before we lose sight for good of such a pair of turtle-doves, s'posin' you tell us what names we're to remember 'em by?'

Now here was the second infraction of the rules of the Camp in one evening, for not a man in it answered to anything but a nickname, there being obvious reasons in almost every instance why he had left

his surname behind him; and any attempt at inquiry upon this point was regarded as not only a breach of good taste but a possible cause of bloodshed.

'My name's Sweet,' said Sam, placidly. 'Sam Sweet, but I never thought to ask my partner his—he'd always be Jack to me if he'd got fifty surnames.'

'Do you mind,' said Long Jim, thoughtfully, 'that new hand what came swaggering up to Jack at the bar one day and said, "I reckon you've changed some, stranger, since I saw you at Ascot three years ago in a grey coat, and a white hat, but then your name was—" only here Jack's pistol happened to go off in the orkerdest way, and nobody ever heard the end of the tale, 'ceptin' the cherubims to whom it couldn't be of no particular consequence.'

'Didn't I always tell you he was one of

them cool, white-handed darned aristocrats?' said the Downy One, in an aggrieved tone. 'That's why he keeps everybody in such order—he's born to it.'

'I don't know nothing about his bein' a aristocrat,' said Sam, slowly, 'though, if so, that's his misfortin', not his fault, but I know that them white hands of his 'll do the best day's work ever I see—and there ain't none here'—Sam's form seemed to swell as he looked round—'as can say he ever give himself airs, or behaved different ('cepting being a little too spry with his revolver, p'r'aps) to any other individual here present; and if he's seemed to do the unhandsome thing by the camp and me, in going down Bendigo way without warning, just you suspend your judgment till you've heard his reason—p'r'aps—' and here Sam nodded towards the line of illimitable bush,

visible through the open door, '*she* found it lonesome-like over there.'

'What is she like?' said Long Jim, dryly.

'Didn't Yankee Bill say she was a light chocolate brown?' said Sam, looking aghast as one who has betrayed a confidence.

'So that *was* his gal,' said Yankee Bill, with a fictitious air of innocence, 'who used to come dropping round the camp at one time—with a gashly sort of face, and a trifle above his own age, if looks don't tell lies?'

Sam smiled slowly, and his smile aggravated those who had thrown down their cards and ceased gambling to listen to him, for the novelty of the subject, the very name of woman being as rigorously tabooed in the camp as her presence, and the length of Jack's late absence, had excited their curiosity about him to an extraordinary degree.

'Folks get a bit off in their tastes when they rise forty,' said Long Jim, drily, 'and, to be sure, if you take females young, they don't afflict you so much as when you take 'em old. But there's no fool like an old 'un, whether male *or* female.'

Sam, who had no taste of his own in women, had been slowly swelling at this outrage on the taste of his partner, for to Sam's fifty-five years the thirty odd of his partner counted as nothing, and suddenly he burst out, 'Well, if I might presoom to name so special-like a matter in this selec' company, I'd say that if anything could be comfortable to the eye in the shape of a woman, she were that, and a bit on to it—with the fixinest eyes ever I see, and a pair of arms as made the finest necklace out of what cost nothin', as if you'd paid down a bag of gold dust for it—and when it comes to that,' said Sam, mopping his

face and looking round, 'where are you, and where, I ask, is your partner? I ain't a small objic' in the landskip,' he added, meditatively, 'but I don't think I were missed when I slipped behind that blue gum, and took a view of things in general, as it were from the wings—but I'm forgetting that I haven't given you the bearin', so to speak, of the sitooashun.'

'Can't you get to the point, instead of using such darned mincing words?' said Long Jim, fiercely.

'I know I'm a poor speaker,' said Sam, who only swore for the sake of appearances, and in moments of excitement not at all, 'and the subjick, too, bein' so out of my line. It must be nigh on two year and a half ago that Jack and I was goin' through the bush midway between Bathurst and Sydney together, and one evening, just as we were sittin' down to tea,

somethin' came whirlin' through the trees and straight into Jack's arms, and points behind her, and with that she holds on to Jack as if she was a b'ar, and he a woman that she was sorter sorry to kill outright. Cucumber Jack, he let her run on, but, p'raps, 'twas his way of holding her, as if he'd been used to handling a good many, and them of the best, which is what a woman likes, though a vartuous arm,' added Sam, with a sigh, 'it ought to feel comfortabler round a woman's waist; but all of a sudden it seemed to come to her recklecksbun that he weren't a tree, and she jest turned her head and looked at him; p'r'aps she'd never seen blue eyes, and that gold-coloured hair before, but she kept on lookin' and lookin' at him, and I kept on lookin' at her, till all of a sudden he tosses her on to his shoulder, and swings her into the nearest tree, and the

next minnit there was about fifty savages with spears in their hands, dancing round, and asking what we'd done with the Maori gal.'

'A Maori!' said Long Jim, scornfully. 'Maories in New South Wales? Look for green peas growing on a blue gum, or lilies of the valley at the bottom of a claim; but there's not a Maori would live among these dirty beastly aborigines!'

'P'r'aps they're used to dirt,' said Sam, in his usual slow way; 'but not so dirty inside as you think. I've seen a power of goodness among 'em, and human nature's mostly streaked, more or less——'

'Like good bacon,' said Portland Dick, with a sneer.

'Just so,' said Sam. Not being used to public speaking, he had long ago lost the thread of his discourse, and now got a clue. 'Talking of bacon, pigs have just been the

saving of them Maories, they never eat one another now that they can get pork, roast and b'iled.'

'Just you try a vegetable diet for a fortnight,' said a saturnine man in the background; 'and if you don't long to take a slice off your juiciest relation in a week, I'm hanged. I don't say a plump stranger ain't better, but a relation's not to be despised.'

'Have you tried one?' said Long Jim, impatiently; then turned to the man who, lost in retrospections, was in the very vein to be surprised of those confidences that Long Jim had always known it to be in his power to give; while, meanwhile, a sly hand had filled his tumbler.

'You said there was fifty savages dancing round; but how was it they didn't catch the gal?'

'Well, my partner and me sat there—

quite careless like—he cleaning a revolver, with a flower in his mouth, while I was cooking a damper, so that there wasn't a trace of her to them as followed. He shook his head that innocent, they thought he couldn't know nothing, and they thought me beyond suspectin' ; but, Lord bless you, when they was all gone, he looked up quite accidental like, but 'stead of the sky there was two great eyes shining through the leaves and flowers like stars, and I sloped off, but plumped up against something —— '

'Every corner has its female,' said Portland Dick, bitterly; 'there's no dodging 'em. But what sort of a one was that ? '

'Only the gal's mother,' said Sam, with a curious ring in his voice. 'But there's them that thinks only white folks can feel —and, to be sure, the girl had got a white father—or I don't know a Maori from an

aborigine; and p'r'aps the mother hung on to see no harm came to the girl; but many a many's the time I've seen her hanging round, as hungry as a dog for a bone, thinking that somewhere we'd got her daughter hid among us.'

'And haven't we?' said Yankee Bill, with an angry snarl, 'else what takes him into the bush every two or three days for a dozen hours or so, and this last time has kep' him there a week? Why, the petticoat that darned crinoline gave us a hint of, and him the biggest woman-hater of us all!'

'If he's hid her,' said Sam, 'it's close; for from that day to this I've never got a sight of her. He went on marching with me just the same; and if he went back that night, and was late next morning picking me up, what's that to a man's partner? But now we've been settled down here this

year and more, I've been glad enough to see him dropping off into the bush promiskis-like; p'r'aps 'twill make him more like his old self, as he was before this gambling fever took him.'

'Woman's a habit, like many another bad one as grows on a man s'prisin',' said Portland Dick, meditatively; 'but a coloured one, I'd never have thought it of a man of Cucumber Jack's taste.'

'P'r'aps 'twas the colour that fetched him,' said Sam, 'for he couldn't abide the name of a white woman, and never looked at a black, and bein' neither the one nor t'other, the vartues and vices of the sex may sort of balance 'emselves in her, and made her almost as moderate and pleasant like, as if she'd been a man.'

'Looks like as if you'd studied the sex,' said Long Jim, curiously, 'and found more

good than bad 'uns; but that ain't my experience, anyway.'

'P'r'aps you remember the bad 'uns longest,' said Sam, simply, 'most men do; but there's a many good mothers and daughters in the world, and wives,' he added, after a moment's pause, in which a struggling memory crossed his features. 'I think Jack's sweetheart's one of that sort; and I'm as glad to hear he've took her with him down Bendigo way, as if he come in here this minnit and brought the luck with him.'

'He'd got rather keerless like of her up till the last three weeks,' said Portland Dick, 'twasn't once in ten days he'd make tracks for the bush.'

'That was so,' said Jack's partner, sadly. 'That's why his staying away so long beat me. But I'd got a notion ——'

'That he was after another woman,' said Yankee Bill, laconically.

'No,' said Sam, 'but that she was dying. That's the only thing as'll bring back a man faithful and lover-like to a woman he's got tired of. And all this fortnight he've been away, I seemed to see him chafing-like because she weren't quicker about it, for he's got the roving blood in him, and he'll be moving on to his dyin' day; but if he takes her with him, it don't siggerfy much about his partner bein' a bit behind.'

'Don't believe he's gone down Bendigo way,' said the Downy One; 'more likely he's got lost in the bush, or the savages have come up with her at last and killed the pair of 'em.'

'Bet I go and find out,' said Sam, rising in great excitement; 'and I'll beat every yard of the bush for ten miles round till I find him.'

'Bet you stay at home,' said a familiar voice behind him, and the camp started

up as one man with a shout of welcome, that flashed the news of Cucumber Jack's return through the whole length and width of the settlement.

'So you were going to look for me, old man,' he said, with his hand on Sam's shoulder. 'And who said I'd gone down Bendigo way?' he added, looking round.

'The Piny,' replied Portland Dick, who was not exactly the peacemaker of the camp, 'said you'd taken your coloured gal with you, and given your partner and us the go-by.'

'Time I came back, when the biggest liar in the camp is installed as its prophet,' said Cucumber Jack, coolly. 'And how's the luck?' he added, turning to Sam, as a dozen hands were stretched to seize the revolver the Piny had snatched from his belt.

'Gone,' said Sam from behind the red bandana, that was his invariable refuge in all situations beyond his usual experience.

'It will come back,' said the new comer, carelessly, as he sat down and lit his pipe, the light falling on the pale, handsome features that offered such a striking contrast to the other faces present. 'And so you thought I'd given you the slip,' he added, turning to Sam.

'I thought there might be reasons,' said Sam, in his usual simple way, 'why you might choose to make new tracks without tellin' your partner; and I should have follerd you—if you didn't want me, 'twas easy enough to move on—and where there's a woman in the case,' he added, in a lower tone, 'why, where is your partner? Nat'rally he takes a back seat, that none but a fool 'ud grumble at.'

'There's no woman in the case,' said

Jack, in his usual distinct tones, and looking Sam straight in the face; 'there isn't one living I'd walk across the camp to meet, or who has any claim on me. I've looked my last on her—and what devil's folly is this?' he added, with a fierce glance at the surrounding men.

Sam's broad face, a moment ago beaming with such honest satisfaction and pride, worked painfully. He leaned forward and said in an audible whisper, 'You haven't quar'led with her—poor soul?'

'What the devil are you talking about?' cried Jack; 'can't a man take a few days' leave without a pack of fools talking?'

'I knew it couldn't last,' said Portland Dick, with the easy audacity of a man born without instincts. 'It's in yer blood to be on the move. Some folks can sow a ten-acre field sitting in their easy chairs, but you ain't one of 'em; and she'll settle

down comfortably enough after a bit as a black man's gin.'

'D—— you!' cried Jack, suddenly, but without raising his voice; 'she was my wife! So you blabbed?' he added, turning to Sam with a glance that ought to have reduced him to tinder.

'And was she, now?' said Dick, quite unabashed; 'and, to be sure, that makes it easy like for you not to want to go back to her. And there's them as says a wife a'most as good as a sweetheart—it's only the cream turned a bit sour on the stomach; and there's some that'll stand it, and not find much difference.'

'So you married her?' said Sam, stretching out his great hand and seizing Jack's slight one. 'That was an hon'able deed of yours, partner—even if you was sorry for it afterwards.'

'Seems as if I'd dropped in on some

blanked prayer-meeting,' said Jack, looking round with a fierce sneer, adding, in the same moment, 'Hark! Didn't you hear something?'

They all held their breath to listen, but there was nothing—nothing but the smothered rush of the distant river, or the still more distant cry of a wandering bird—while through the open doorway the brilliant stars looked their eternal silence, seeming to ask what question demanded by man could be worth the answer.

'There's nothing abroad,' said Long Jim, with an oath; but Sam still stood listening, his eyes fixed on the open door.

'Didn't you hear it?' he said, anxiously, 'just like the sobbin' of a child, or a woman callin'——'

'P'r'aps she's calling you,' said Portland Dick, coarsely; but Jack, who was himself again, looked up from his cards, and said,

'Too late, old man,' and smiled, possibly at the idea of Sam's figuring as a pilgrim of love.

But Sam caught neither look nor smile. His attention had been fixed by a curious little blue flower worn in his partner's coat, and the like of which he had seen but once before, and then in some bleak spot (that he could not just then remember) where its presence had struck him with surprise. It did not occur to him to remove his eyes while he puzzled out the question, and Jack, cursing himself for a sentimental fool in wearing the flower, nevertheless burst out laughing at the idea of Sam as a possible Nemesis, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

CHAPTER II.

THAT Misogamy Camp was itself again, the entire settlement — trying in vain that night to sleep—had abundant proof, while a couple of shots, exchanged across the table at midnight by two gentlemen whose notions of playing euchre did not exactly coincide, only raised a little cheerful speculation as to whose claims were likely to be vacant on the morrow.

Sam sat through carouse, brawl, and gambling alike, without taking any more active part in the proceedings than at intervals to solemnly lift and carry out to their respective shanties such of the com-

pany as had been overmatched by the bottle. He further made himself useful by interposing the vast bulk of his person between Yankee Bill and the Downy One at a critical moment, so that the shot intended for the skull of the latter made a hole in the barrel which Sam had just vacated, at which Jack laughed again, and said he had thought the barrel to be Sam himself.

Between whiles, the only sober man present sat and watched his partner, the machinery of his slow mind painfully revolving in a certain direction that made him shake his head sadly once or twice, and discover for the first time in Jack's handsome face something not quite according with his own heart and fancy.

Towards morning, when the orgie of the night had narrowed down to a group of men who seemed to have caught something

of their leader's reckless spirit, and to gamble with their very souls as they played, Sam leaned forward, and, putting his hand on his partner's arm, said, 'You're *never* going back?'

The other shook his touch off with a curse. Then, looking up and seeing whose it was, the wild excitement died out of the gambler's eyes, and a dangerous expression crossed his face.

'Drop it,' he said, curtly. 'Take my advice—if you want to be friends—drop it,' then plunged once more in the delirium of the game.

Sam, still watching, like a man who expects that something will by-and-by reward his patience, at length found it in the peculiar shape of the handkerchief that his partner carelessly drew out, and, having passed across his brows, as carelessly thrust back again, though not

before Sam's slow eyes had noted its every point.

A gold-digger's handkerchief that was made of fine white cambric, frilled at the edges, and with two little doll's sleeves hanging from it, was a curiosity in its way; but Sam distinctly remembered to have seen such a handkerchief before, though (like the blue flower) he could not remember where he had seen its fellow.

He rose, and, groping his way out of that evil atmosphere to the pure one of the night beyond, closed the cabin door behind him, and stood for awhile without movement of any kind, and lost in thought.

Frills! Sam's slow mind, travelling backward through deep and unaccustomed ruts towards a memory that for ever escaped him, demanded answer first of the

austere silence of the brilliant skies, and then of the scattered shanties that lay between him and the dim green line behind which stretched, vast and treacherous, the Australian bush.

Was it fancy, or did one remote star seek to give restless reply as it quivered above a rocky point many miles distant, in the neighbourhood of which, as it suddenly flashed upon him, he had seen a flower similar to the one worn by his partner to-night? Climbing one day into that upper region where none save a stray shepherd or two ever came, Sam had remarked a cluster of blue flowers nestling in the crevice of a naked rock, as though Nature had sent a glance upwards where she could not herself follow, and where her glance lit, the flowers had sprung.

Sam drew a deep breath, as one who

has achieved the half of a difficult journey, then again sent his mind in quest of those same 'frills' that puzzled him so sorely. He had never seen a doll dressed in his life, but all at once it came back upon him that he had seen such a curious pocket-handkerchief in his wife's hand on the day she died, and her child with her, telling him with her last breath how she had hated him, and loved his friend all her life.

Sam tried to think of how that woman might have felt if she had loved *him*, and he'd 'looked his last on her,' wondered if what might have filled that curious handkerchief would have contented her, shook his head sadly, and with a parting glance at that distant point of light, retired to the shanty that till within the last fortnight he had shared with his partner, and tried to sleep.

But his senses were fanciful to-night, changing the even flow of the river to the roaring of a mountain torrent, as it swept down a rocky gulch; while the far-off cries of two distant birds sounded in his ears like the mingled weeping of a mother and her child. And once he started up with the sweat on his brow, for he could have sworn that something had touched his hand; or did his memory play him a trick, and was he dreaming of certain tiny baby fingers that by chance he had touched, when he stooped to kiss the dead lips of the woman who had betrayed him?

He threw his blanket aside, and went out. The lights in the sky were waning, and dawn was not far away; but as yet the settlement slumbered, and the curse of gold lay still on it, or in the dreamers' hearts turned to a blessing, as home ties

rudely sundered were in spirit re-knit, and son met mother, and husband wife, with love in their hearts, and in their hands that which by its use found itself ennobled.

Sam had no stake in the game; the handful of gold that he might squander each day on some rude camp luxury defrauded no creature at home to whom that handful might mean life itself. He was nothing to nobody; just as over yonder, and his eyes again sought that distant star, was perhaps some one who ought to be something to somebody. Insensibly he found himself moving towards the pale beacon, and even hurrying his steps as it waned, so that if there had been any eyes strengthened by the dawn to pierce the bush line, they might have seen how at the moment the star faded out

of the sky, the lonely figure of a man appeared on the summit of that peak above which it had seemed to keep watch and ward.

CHAPTER III.

SAM'S absence at breakfast next morning created little remark, but when at smoking time, Sam's partner was himself found to be missing, consternation and disgust settled down upon Misogamy camp, that felt itself in the position of a cock who has been misled by a flash of lightning to rise at midnight and proclaim day.

'Darned if I don't believe he's gone back to her!' cried Long Jim, with a vigorous slap of his thigh. 'And last night he seemed as glad to be back among us as a jay bird hopping round a tree, and swore he'd looked his last on her.'

And so he had, as any one might have found out, who had followed him along a certain rocky trail that led upwards by almost inaccessible paths to the summit upon which his partner had stood at day-break, and, like him, looked back upon the way that he had just traversed.

'The wanderer's kingdom,' he said aloud, in a tone of exultation, and drew in a deep breath of the pure bush air as though it were life and liberty itself, then thought of a certain estate in England, and smiled in sudden scorn that any should be found to covet it.

The sun was at that moment rising, and Titanic wreaths of mist were rolling away from the summits of the hills to the green valleys below, where they lingered in fragments like a struggling host, till broad banners of gold and crimson light swept down the hill-sides, and

touching each ridge and outline, caused them to stand sharply out through that shadowy veil, which faded imperceptibly and in a haze of amber.

He descended the peak on the other side, and followed, for awhile, the spirit of spring who had but now passed this way, her recent flitting marked by the paler hue that had lately touched the trees, and by the green foot-prints that she had left through the forest, as she wended her way to the deep pools of water that lay in the rocky beds of the gullies. Perhaps he missed that gentle companionship as he climbed yet higher, emerging upon a desolate region shut in by huge towering rocks, some brown and naked, others covered with stunted trees and short scrub, with here and there a small cleared space, as though in former times there had been found men and

women to live and die in this bleak upper air.

But when at last he quickened his steps as one who nears home, and advanced boldly on a rock that rose three hundred feet above him, one might have guessed him to be blind, till, pausing immediately below a tuft of flowers that sunk in a crevice, seemed to smile out at him with blue eyes of welcome, he thrust aside a stunted dwarf shrub that grew close to the rock, and disappeared as suddenly as though he had passed through it like a spirit.

He had, in reality, crept through an opening wide enough for a man's body, but through which a coffin might not go, and now stood erect, and looking about him.

For Nature, who had climbed thus high, if only in sterile mood, had in some

unseen convulsion, pierced that towering wall to its very bowels, fashioning within it a chamber some twenty feet square, open to the air, and that light without which the forest creature withers and dies, open even to the rains of heaven; for the rude waterproof contrivance stretched from side to side twelve feet overhead was rarely drawn, and from out of the almost invisible recess carved in the solid rock one might lie and listen to the roar of the elements above, untouched by rain and the winds that had not the power, even if they had the will, to sweep so low.

Perchance in by-gone ages, some ancient monarch had here obtained rude sepulture, and those who laid him to rest had thought they gave him monument more lasting than if they had dug his grave in the forest, with the surrounding

trees marked in hieroglyphics that told of his virtues, but the curiosity of man had laid bare and defiled this secret resting-place, while out yonder, deep in the virgin fastness of the forest, some less mighty chief slept undisturbed, rocked by the lullaby of the pines, and guarded by the eternal army that each year shed their leaves above him as in weeping, or grew green again in his honour. For here the living had clearly come to lay their bones in sleep above those of the dead; the rough-hewn recess, above which certain characters were carved, still contained a bed on which was marked the outline of a human form. On a niche in the opposite wall (upon it no living thing grew) hung a brown woman's scant armoury of coquetry and pride. At the farther end a contrivance for cooking was visible; beside it a stout cupboard grotesquely

suggested the necessaries of existence in this remote and barren spot.

How could a man deliberately decide to dwell in it? Perhaps because if he chose to have a secret, he also chose to keep it safe, and would take none but the stars, and winds, and stern Nature herself into his confidence; but surely Jack had reason to suppose that one or other had betrayed him, when on entering he cast a quick suspicious look around, then suddenly exclaimed—

'Too late, by ——!'

He pulled himself together, and walked to the sarcophagus, above which a rude couch was laid, placed his hand on the pillow next the wall, and finding it still warm, muttered something not easily understood, then turned aside, and read an inscription on the wall of rock opposite the recess, that ran thus:—

'*Wanda, Wife to John Trefusis. Died October 1st*, 18—. *Aged twenty.*'

Not a living thing stirred, not the flutter of a leaf, or the splash of a raindrop came between him and that imperishable record of a brief life. As if fatigued, his eyes sank from it to the newly-disturbed earth below, that in shape exactly corresponded with the recess on the opposite side. Perhaps the loneliness of the dead struck him in a way that the isolation of the living had never done, as in the intense stillness he looked up to the skies, three hundred feet above him, whose alternations from rain to sunshine afforded the only sign of life and movement within ken.

It was a situation to fill the soul first with awe, then apathy, then despair, as God's stupendous works, unshared, and

over-mused on, will, and so one day madness overtakes the gazer, and a self-inflicted death is rushed upon with ardour when the mere sound of a human voice or the contact of a human hand might cure and save him.

It crossed Jack's mind as he stood looking down on that grave, how frightfully prevalent of late, madness and suicide had been among shepherds and isolated settlers, but this woman had had companionship, however little she loved it, and for himself, even if long absent, he had never failed to climb the steep path that led to her at last.

How often during the past fortnight he had sat where he was now standing, each pulse on stretch to return to the camp, and wondering why she did not bid him go, for with that brilliant colour on cheek and lip, he did not believe

that she was really ailing, till one night she crept cold and pale into his arms, and with her dark eyes seeking those blue ones that had made her heaven, bestowed on him the last best gift it was in her power to give—freedom. For in his veins was that wandering blood that has before now drawn men out from the narrow bondage of a high destiny to rove the world over as vagabonds, thus fulfilling, as De Guérin has declared, the only true conditions of humanity; and love was for a day, but freedom was life, though, perhaps, as he folded the beautiful arms of the wild forest child above her brown breast, and for the last time kissed her lips, he realised that they had made a happier resting-place for him in the intervals of his wanderings than he had ever dreamed of, or was likely to chance on again.

And, then, in an impulse, half of chivalry, half of audacious humour, he had set himself to carve that inscription above her, feeling each stroke an added insult to a world whose opinions he so profoundly despised, and smiling grimly to himself on its completion.

But to-day he saw no humour in the deed, only an ineffaceable piece of folly that might betray him. The stray shepherd who by extraordinary chance might stumble upon this secret chamber, would not connect that name with the gold-digger of the creek below; and who else was likely to come here, except—but no, that was impossible. A single blue flower would not lead a man five miles through the bush by innumerable secret paths; or a fault in the shape of a pocket-handkerchief inspire a dullard with wit and

courage to carry out an incredibly difficult enterprise.

'He might win the first *coup*, but he couldn't play the game out,' said Jack, aloud, as he sat down on the bed above the stone sarcophagus, and lit his pipe. 'It was a shady thing to do though,' he added, still thinking aloud, 'the sort of thing that a man who kicks his wife to death would be ashamed of; but it's the custom here, and a humane one—for what's the little beggar to do, with its mother dead, and its father a savage or a wanderer, or both?'

Suddenly a thought struck him, and he drew out his knife, and slowly, painfully erased, one by one, the letters of the inscription. The labour was great, and hunger, by-and-by, warned him that

the breakfast hour was long past, so that he finished his task eagerly, then with a last look downwards, disappeared through the crevice of the rock.

Without, he had the choice of two routes, one to the Camp, the other to a town thirty miles distant, where he would be received with such a welcome as might make him forget the contempt of a few poor miners, who owned but one virtuous man among them.

A westerly gale was blowing, and seemed to sweep the tresses of the yellow acacias like yellow foam up the hillside to where he stood. A moment, and the sharp, sudden storm had passed, and, smitten by a vivid burst of sunshine into gold, the sea of flowers seemed to recede from him like the tide from one who stands lonely on the seashore.

For a moment he stood to watch the effect of the brilliant storm and sunshine, then sprang lightly down the hill towards the Camp, and so out of sight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE partners dropped into their places within five minutes of each other that night, but as it was taken for granted that they had been together all day, they were alike received with a frosty civility that embarrassed Sam, but in some curious way seemed to amuse and exhilarate Cucumber Jack.

In his character of guest of the evening, here to-day and gone to-morrow, it was considered ill-bred that the latter should suddenly cross over to his partner and insist on playing with him a game of euchre, whereupon Sam, unwillingly emerg-

ing from behind his red handkerchief, played the cards sent him by Providence in such a style as to euchre his partner seven times running.

This run of luck in a man who had only acquired the art of playing cards, as of swearing, in middle age, attaining proficiency in neither, attracted general attention, so that, by degrees, the whole Camp gathered round, and bets were freely exchanged as to the result of what, on Jack's side, seemed more a determinately fought out duel, than a mere game of chance played with an old friend.

But, suddenly, with a great oath, and a look straight into Sam's eyes, Jack dashed his cards down and turned away; whereupon Sam, resuming his inevitable shield against what he called 'orkerdness,' remarked, apologetically, that it was a warm night for the time of year,

adding that it was wonderfully cool-like in the bush, whither he had gone to look after a bit of sawyering he had heard of—the luck being so bad and sawyering an occupation that paid almost as well (the river being handy for dropping the timber down stream to Melbourne) in the end as gold dust. 'But if his partner had come to stay,' and here he looked towards that gentleman, 'he had no objection to going on in the same tracks as before,' to which Jack making no reply, and the Camp perceiving something amiss between the two men, unconsciously sided with Sam in the business.

But when next morning the luck had come back with a rush, appearing in the first cradle full of dirt rocked by Jack, the Camp was again at his feet, and in the absorbed day's work there were none to notice how, though working side by

side, the partners seldom exchanged a syllable, though curiously enough neither could disappear for even five minutes without exciting the restlessness of the other.

But one night when the rush had yielded to habit, and the Camp was able to enjoy the security of knowing that its gold-dust had set out under strong escort for a colonial Bank, Sam once more broached his idea of going in for a little sawyering, announcing that he had found a sawyer's hut, and a couple of blacks who meant work, and he reckoned he could earn a tidy sum by it; and his health not being what it had been (though this was not apparent), and always having had a sort of hankering after the green, he had concluded to devote two or three days a week to the new business.

'But not wishing to act unhandsome

by my partner,' Sam remarked, waving the inevitable bandana towards Jack, 'and sawyering being my sole *re*-creation, so to speak, it's only fair that I should leave somebody to do my share of work in the claim'—and here he put forward a shrinking, timid-faced man, who seemed afraid of his own shadow, but was understood to remark that he was agreeable to the proposed arrangement, 'if both the partners approved.'

'D—— your sawyering,' said Jack looking up; but this being viewed in the light of assent, Bob, henceforth called the Triangular, from his relation to the two partners, duly appeared next morning in Sam's place, discharging his duties in a way that disarmed criticism.

But after Sam had departed and returned twice or thrice, each time with such a glow of happiness on his honest face as

showed how he had found health, or something better still, beyond that green bush line, it began to be noticed that his departure was the signal for Jack's disappearance, which last was followed in its turn by that of Triangular Bob, so that the triple partnership which left a claim unworked for hours together in flush times, gradually concentrated upon it the undivided attention and extraordinary acumen of no less a person than Long Jim.

He, too, was found to develope an abnormal longing for bush air, and it was while indulging this innocent taste that he accidentally discovered Cucumber Jack hiding in the scrub, and watching Sam, as he sat unsuspiciously at his dinner on one of his own felled trees, and looking as if he had been bred and born in Nature's broad green lap all his days.

That Triangular Bob should, at fifty

yards distance, be watching Jack, did not occur to Long Jim, till tripping over that gentleman the two worthies indulged in a rude war-dance and pantomime that betokened triumph over a common foe; after which Long Jim repaired to the Camp, and with one eye on the door related the adventures of the afternoon.

Perhaps the idea of espionage on honest Sam's movements jarred on the Camp's rude notions of honour; perhaps that increasing uncertainty of Jack's temper which made him dangerous to deal with had weakened his hold over the men, or, cloyed with gold, they had become characteristically ungrateful to the cause of their good fortune; in any case his influence seemed on the decline, while to their surprise the men found themselves looking regretfully towards the vacant barrel that Sam had so long and faithfully adorned,

and that in shape and height he so strongly resembled.

There was no pretence now of speech between the partners. Sam's round, beaming face, hitherto appended as a sort of admiring comma to his partner's brilliant remarks, was now either devoid of meaning, or bright with thoughts that sprang from his own simple heart, and by no means dependent on his partner's reckless wit.

It was remarked by more than one about this time that a new sort of look had come over Sam, though no one could exactly say where the change lay, with the exception of Jack, who had traced his partner through every minute and subtle change of cleanliness and happiness, until the open consummation of Sam departing bush-wards one day in a scarlet flannel shirt and blue jumper did not come upon him with the burst of surprise that

the apparition caused the rest of the Camp.

'Blest if I don't believe he's got a sweetheart,' said Yankee Bill, looking after him; 'did ever you see a man clean himself up that way to go sawyering? Yah! There's a petticoat somewhere near that shanty of his, and a petticoat that likes a bit of colour too.'

But Sam's character and build so entirely negatived the preposterous idea, that the suggestion was consigned to deserved oblivion, although, as Long Jim one day darkly remarked (in Jack's absence), there were certain virulent complaints that a man sometimes got rid of best, by passing them off to somebody else, and that cases had been known in which a man winked at his friend's taking off his hands a wife that he had got tired of himself—adding, that Sam was just the man to go about

mending the heads that other folks had broken.

But to this it was objected that Sam's taste was not likely to be that of Cucumber Jack, and that if the transfer hinted at had been effected on friendly principles, there would not be the present coolness between the two men.

And meanwhile out yonder, beyond the dim bush line the season stole on by subtle graduations to its brief growing splendour, and over many a league of plain and meadow the oak-grass waved its blue-green tassels, so that sometimes the Camp would lift its eyes from the dust to look up at that tender wall of green against the brilliant azure, and think that Sam was no such fool to steal a day from work now and then, to take a holiday out beyond, coming home with such a light of happiness in his face as if the glow out yonder had

touched him also, and warmed his heart. The luck had clearly changed, however late in life, for poor despised Sam, and there were some to envy the honest fellow and wish that their stomachs had been less fastidious, and as able to be satisfied with as homely, simple pleasures as was he. Perhaps the oat-grass, reminding him as it did of the familiar hay field at home, set his thoughts running upon England, for about this time he spoke frequently of 'going home,' having made his pile, and wishing to count it over with the old folks before they turned their toes up.

It might be that in his communion with nature Sam's eyes had gradually become opened to the coarseness of life and manners at the Camp, but his absences from it became so frequent that his work fell mainly on the shoulders of Triangular Bob, while he himself became, contrary to all

likelihood of appearance, an echo of romance from the unknown bush to the gold-diggers who dwelt on its verge. 'It's a wonderful occupation, sawyering,' he would say, and somehow the Camp had got into the way of listening with respect to this simple fellow who had unconsciously a humanizing effect upon all who approached him, 'and one that's made me a happier man than ever I was before. I've seed sights and heard things out yonder as I'ud never have believed on, an' that's given me, so to speak, a eddication. There's the curiosest birds and beasts, fit to kill a man with laffin: and the tricksiness of them bower birds and water-moles is beyond believing; and then the wegetables—there's the satin-flower spreading out in sheets of white velvet, acre upon acre, fit for fairies to sleep in: and the lilawks as smell out as sweet after sun-down as if they were

bewitch'd, and miles upon miles of red-clover——'

'Don't tell me about your onnat'ral red clover,' remarked the Downy One indignantly; 'there's a field of yaller buttercups to the right of Bushey Park avenue as 'ud bang every p'ison flower in the bush. Lord! To see them buttercups a-shining through the young green of the hoss-chestnuts; I never see no gold-dust to equal 'em—and how drunk I did get that day to be sure!' he added, meditatively.

'Buttercups don't smell,' said the Piny, contemptuously. 'Did you ever dip your nose right down into a bunch of red carnations, or carry a faggot of lilawks and may at your back, and feel the sniff of it go right up through your soul? That's better than any buttercups, nor red clover neither.'

'But there's myrtles in the bush,' objected Sam, 'and lots of sweet-smelling

things, and finer oat-grass you'd never see at home——'

'What's oat-grass without the corn-cockle standing beside it, any more than barley's barley without its moon-daisies, or corn without its poppies?' said Long Jim in fierce scorn; 'and I never see none of them natural flowers here; but poppies is my favourites, standing each in his scarlet coat at the grain's shoulder—as light as gossamer, and as tough as oak; you may bend but you can't break them; they just look up at you as sarcy-like as a jay bird, after a storm that's beat the wheat down level with the ground. And it's a pretty sight to see them fold their hearts into red cups at sun-down, and ten to one if you don't find nestling round their feet a cluster of bind-wind looking up at you with sweeter eyes than were ever looked out of a woman's head—but darn'd if I

ain't a'most talking poitry,' ended Long Jim, with a shamefaced and apologetic glance around.

'And I say,' struck in the Downy One, 'that to sit under a honeysuckle hedge, with a gallon of strong beer beside you and good company, licks all the smells and sights in creation.'

'A pack of cards is worth the whole b'iling of 'em,' said Yankee Bill, looking round with supreme scorn; 'blest if I don't believe we'll come to prayers night and morning, if this here beastly state of romanticalness is a going on much longer.'

'The Camp might do worse,' said Sam, in his simple way; and so perhaps the Camp thought, and with some idea of participating in his joys, half-a-dozen of the men one Sunday paid him a visit (duly washed up for the occasion) and with some vague expectation of finding beyond that green

bush line something that might make them feel and look like Sam.

But they did not find the elixir of happiness that they had expected. Perhaps they had not the patience to walk ten miles on stretch to behold the wonders that Sam had described, or their eyes, blinded with gold dust, were not open to perceive all that his had done. They found it 'kind of lonely,' and felt 'skeery-like,' and glad to get back to the bustle and noise of the Camp, though still on week days they would pause to wipe the sweat from their brows and look after Sam going off in his blue jumper and scarlet flannel shirt, with a revolver in his belt, and such an air of effulgent beaming bliss steeping him from head to foot as might make many an epicure wish himself less fastidious.

But there were onlookers who foresaw a tragic ending to Sam's happiness, and who

did not laugh at the absurdities of the triangular arrangement that worked so oddly.

Some said that Jack objected to the partnership forced upon him, 'as if a man who had killed at least a dozen people accidentally had a right to be so dirty particular about a person who had only killed one, and that his wife,' as Long Jim remarked, who considered the aggravatingness of the cause as more than sufficient to account for the suddenness of the catastrophe that had sent Bob to waste his sweetness on the desert air for the term of his natural life.

But when Sam was warned that his former friend's mood was dangerous both to the new partner and himself, he merely remarked that he and Jack understood one another, and how the latter wasn't one to go shooting at another man from behind a tree; while in fair fight he (Sam) was able

to take care of himself. But if by any accident he were found dropped in his tracks, they were to blame nobody, but just to deliver over his effects to Bob, and see that his share in the claim was duly made over likewise to the said Bob as residuary legatee.

There were those who wondered at Sam's confidence in the Triangular One, but being able to separate a man's heart from his deeds, and knowing more of Bob's history than any other person in the Camp, Sam found no reason to alter his testamentary instructions, and once or twice it had happened (when Jack was safely settled at cards) that the two men had been seen disappearing side by side in the direction of the bush.

But one evening Long Jim rushed into the Camp in a wild state of excitement, vowing that not a mile away, and in a

totally opposite direction to the sawyering business, he had just seen Sam or Sam's ghost.

'He ain't a shadder,' said Long Jim, 'but darned if I didn't see him standing by a monstrous great thick tree one minute, and when I'd come up with him, he were gone as clean as a whistle, and I could a'most have swore that I heard him laffin' in the midst of a chattering of blue-jays overhead just like as if he were mocking me.'

It was suggested that Long Jim had seen double, or that the girth of the tree being by his own account over twenty feet, Sam had patiently and invisibly dodged his pursuer round it, but this idea was indignantly scouted by the latter.

'Warn't there the underwood and scrub all round it?' he inquired, in tones of scorn; 'and is Sam the sort of figger to go dodging

for the best part of an hour?' And, indeed, on Sam's being taxed with the unusual feat, that gentleman remarked, in his usual serious way, that his build was scarcely adapted to that sort of exercise, and he concluded that Long Jim must have mistaken some other person for him.

If Long Jim's tongue was for a moment silenced, the scent of that inquiring nose of his was not, and diligent investigation elucidated the fact that a stumpy form corresponding with Sam's had been more than once observed hanging round the identical tree mentioned by Long Jim, though on approaching it the figure was said to disappear like a puff of air,—the blacks said, who now feared to approach it after sundown, believing it bewitched.

But if Long Jim's eyes were not to be believed, he was not going to bring forward the evidence of others as superior testi-

mony, and bided his time, until one evening he electrified the Camp by rushing in with the intelligence that he had just caught Sam colloguing behind a blue gum with the handsome gin of a neighbouring aborigine.

'But that's nothing,' added Long Jim, in extraordinary excitement; 'only what do you think he was asking her, if never I move from this spot? Why, what was the best thing to give a child as was cutting a tooth hard!'

But here Sam, appearing with perturbed face in the doorway, and glancing anxiously round to see if his original partner were present, gave Jim the lie direct by declaring that his conversation with the young woman was of a totally different character, though he admitted that she was only a mutual friend in the business—in short, a go-between, accustomed to carry messages between him and his sweetheart.

But somehow the contemplation of Sam as a man of gallantry had an irresistible tickling effect on the beholders, so that Portland Dick, who had never been known to laugh before, was betrayed into what sounded like the grating of innumerable files in the abysmal recesses of his stomach, while from that night suspicions began to be entertained that the sawyering business had all along been a blind to a less innocent occupation; so that surprise parties were constantly dropping in on the hut, where Sam was invariably found, mopping his brows and overlooking his underlings at work without, just as able to discourse of the beauties of nature as if he had not recently forfeited all claim to the rights of a moral preacher.

Jack surveyed all these events with the sneer that now seemed habitual to his handsome face; his eyes, too, had

gathered a hard, suspicious look that seemed for ever questioning the motives and thoughts of those about him, till at last there came to be a sort of charmed circle drawn around him that none dared attempt to pass. The very passion for gambling even seemed in abeyance, though perhaps another form of it just then possessed him in his determination to play out to the death the game that had been entered upon by himself and partner.

One night, when both men happened to be present, the subject of infanticide among the aborigines cropped up, and Long Jim, with a curious twinkle of the eye, asked Sam's views on the subject.

'Not having brought up a family, and not knowing the ways of one,' said Sam, seriously, 'p'r'aps I'm not the person to pass an opinion; but it seems to me that the savages' way of killing the child with its

mother when its father ain't able to bring it up comfortable, is kinder like in the end than to let it linger on and die of hunger. I think 'twould drive me mad,' he added, with a tremble in his voice, 'to see a little 'un crying for the bread I'd not got to give it; but if them, as can keep it an' won't, should leave it to starve because they don't want to be troubled with it, why, I look upon such persons as murderers,' said Sam, his even voice swelling out, 'especially when the mother has borne a hard life for love of him, and left in his care what's the very moral of himself.'

'Darn you!' cried Jack, starting to his feet, and drawing his revolver. 'What do you mean?'

Sam had resumed his pipe and puffed at it a few seconds before he replied.

'I thought this was an abstrack discussion,' he said, calmly, at last, 'but if it

consarns you in any way—which I can't see—why you've my apologies for my dropping on so orkerd-like a subject.'

Whereupon, with a curse, Jack put up his weapon and went out, Sam placidly remarking, 'that the roving blood had broken out again in his partner, sure enough, and a bit of change might be good for his health;' then reverted to his pipe and those thoughts of his sweetheart that never failed to make his face shine as though it had been a harvest moon.

CHAPTER V.

SAM'S situation was not productive of so much amusement to the Camp as had been expected, it being found equally impossible to obtain a glimpse of his charmer, or to extract from him any information on the subject, beyond the fact that his intentions were strictly 'hon'able.'

That they should be anything else, the whole contour of his face and figure forbade, though it was hard to say how Long Jim's rejected notion, that a woman was at the bottom of the split between the original partners, gradually came to be accepted by the Camp as the true one.

But even the presence of Jack, with that sneer on his lips, which had lately lost something of its fine philosophy, could not hinder the smile that would steal over Sam's broad face when, in a strictly literal spirit, its charms were held up for his own inspection, looking-glasses being scarce in the Camp.

'She don't seem to mind it,' he would remark, simply; 'there never was a sweetheart loved a man better than she loves me, or as I love her,' he added, with a tenderness that mocked at grammar.

When it was urged that his persistent hiding of her proved him ashamed of his choice, and when Long Jim darkly added that any man might get a sweetheart, but it was the quality that made her a credit or the reverse to him that took up with her, Sam was not to be drawn into re-

plying, though his great form would swell, and his face work when any disparagement to her person was uttered; but when they came to attack her eyes as being of the colour and brightness of sloes, Sam's self-control deserted him, and bringing down his fist with a mighty thump on the table before him, 'They're blue!' he shouted, 'blue as a bit of heaven—the sweetest, luvinest eyes that ever looked in a man's face and trusted him, or into his heart and made a sunshine there;' then, catching his partner's glance, suddenly faltered, and was silent.

'Reck'n a colour'd girl with blue eyes is a sort of *phe*-nomenon,' said Yankee Bill, drily; 'perhaps her heels takes after her eyes, and fits her boots different to what black ones usually do.'

'The littlest, whitest feet you ever saw in all your days,' cried Sam, forgetting

Jack in his excitement; 'the pair of 'em 'ud stand in my hand!'

And he held out a member that in size and shape closely resembled a leg of mutton.

'Had a white father, I s'pose,' said Long Jem; 'but that nasty woolly hair—ugh! It's like putting up with blankets in hot weather, cause you can't get sheets. I never could abide door-mats on folks' heads.'

But Sam was not to be drawn again; only some evenings later, when Jack was absent (with Triangular Bob in close attendance) he unearthed from an inner pocket a scrap of white paper, that, on being solemnly handed round, was found to contain a lock of exquisitely soft-brown hair, more closely resembling silk than the door-mat alluded to by Long Jim.

'My sweetheart's,' said Sam, with an

explanatory wave of the hand. 'There's nothing prettier than a little curly head, cover'd over with that sort of stuff, and set off by a blue eye, with a dark lash—she sot as still as a mouse, she did, while I was a cuttin' of it off—just as sensible and as sweet as if she know'd why I wanted it. Some day,' said Sam, with a wistful look in his honest eyes, 'p'r'aps things 'll smooth themselves out a bit, so as I can introjooce you to her, and you'll be sorry then you made ribald jokes upon her, though she's too innercent to understand or mind 'em—God bless her!'

From that night all coarse allusions to Sam's Sweetheart ceased; the men even pressed upon him little gifts to take to her when he departed on sawyering days, and in return he once or twice brought back curious bouquets of flowers, 'Picked by her own small fingers,' he would announce with great

pride, 'and sent with her humble thanks and cumplements.'

It was afterwards remembered how in those days the Camp insensibly got into a different way of speaking of women than they had ever done before. Some were even found to confess that perhaps they had been hard on the old woman at home.

'And to be sure,' remarked the Piny meditatively, 'I liked my potatoes biled, and she liked 'em roasted; and p'r'aps if I'd put up with 'em roasted, being a woman, she'd soon have fancied 'em biled, and not gone off with a feller whose favourite dish was roast pork and taters to correspond.'

Other reasons, equally interesting, were given by different members of the Camp for the rupture of friendly relations with their wives. So that about this time more than one letter was secretly written home, and despatched by the express man, he

being bound over by solemn oaths not to divulge the name of the persons to whom the letters were addressed.

Perhaps they did not then realise how much of this gentle, humanising influence was due to the honest fellow who came and went between the Camp and his sweetheart in this golden summer of his life, though when from time to time he still spoke of going home, a curious sense of discomfort would fall on these men, who, though late in the day, were beginning to draw comparisons between the steady sincerity and grave truth of the one partner against the heartless dare-devilry and selfish cynicism of the other.

'Sam was not one to judge hardly of anybody,' they argued, 'and he loved Jack once beyond everything. If they weren't friends the fault was Jack's not Sam's;' especially when it was observed that, for all

the cool assurance of the former, his eyes would fall before Sam's steady ones when they met.

Long Jim one day announced that whatever colour she might be, he was certain that Sam had lit on something good in his sweetheart.

'There's women,' he said, 'as worry a man, an' make him mad-like, and cross with his victuals, and his drink, and his friends; and there's others as make a man happy and set his face a-shining, and Sam's Sweetheart is one of that sort. She mayn't be a beauty, but she's a good un—what's better.'

There was no talk of a wedding, a word dropped here and there by Sam seeming to imply that his sweethearting business was to go on indefinitely; and this seemed to point to some obstacle between him and her that once again revived Long Jim's old idea,

though the colour of her eyes was felt to be a stumbling-block in the way of that elucidation of the riddle.

With a sentiment of delicacy that did them credit, the men never now volunteered to accompany Sam in his excursions; and he did not press them, as before, to do so: though when one Saturday towards the end of the summer Long Jim reproachfully reminded him of that promise of an 'introduction' to her, Sam renewed the promise, and the very next day redeemed it.

For some reason the Camp, on that Sabbath morning, had risen earlier than its wont, and from its shanty doors was looking on at the usual spectacle of Sam departing for the bush, when Jack, coming from the river where he had been bathing about the same time as Sam, seized his partner by the throat, and, 'You villain!' he cried, 'give me back what you stole

from the pocket-book I left in my waistcoat!'

Perhaps with that grasp on his throat Sam could not have answered if he would; perhaps his eyes held a meaning that maddened the other; or the involuntary movement of Sam's hand to his belt was misunderstood by him, for, suddenly loosing his hold, Jack fired, and then there was the every-day spectacle of one man walking away and another lying either dead or dying on the ground.

From the miners' point of view the deed required no justification; nor did Jack, as he strolled leisurely out of sight, think of volunteering any; a man who knew himself robbed by another was self-constituted judge, jury, and executioner in one, and none might venture to question the finality of the sentence.

But perhaps it was the contrast of Sam's

deathly face, with his blue jumpers, or some thought of the sweetheart who was now expecting him out yonder, crossed their minds, or again some hitherto unsuspected sentiment of strong affection for the honest fellow made itself felt in those around, for there was a cry of indignation as Sam dropped, holding both hands to his side, and supported by Triangular Bob, who said hoarsely—

'You've got your billet this time, old man!'

'That's it,' said Sam, simply; then whispering something in Bob's ear, who had no need to beckon to Long Jim to take his place, Bob set off instantly in the direction of the bush, Sam's eyes following his progress with painful eagerness.

'I did do it,' he said, looking up at the faces gathered around him. 'I stole it, don't you try for to punish him, and I deserve

what I got. . . If you could carry me a bit of a way into the green . . . . I always favor'd the green, and so did she.'

His great size made this a matter of some difficulty, though at last, with intense agony to him, they carried him through the Camp, past the claims with their wooden platforms and shoots, each with the inevitable cradle and dray beside it, while from the open doors of their shanties some of the men looked up curiously, wondering what circumstances could have caused so much fuss to be made about so everyday an occurrence, while a few followed to where just within the shadow of the bush they laid him down, his face turned towards the bank, with its fine clear river turned yellow by the toil of the gold-washers, the high gorgeous scrub trees with their deep green branches drooping down to the very water's edge.

He opened his eyes presently and said feebly, while a smile stole over his face—

'You've often chaffed me about my sweetheart, and now you'll see her; and if she isn't just the sort of one you expected, she's the only one I ever had that loved me. You used to laugh when I told you she'd the littlest feet that 'ud stand in the palm of my hand . . . What's o'clock?' he added, suddenly, and they told him it was half after eleven. 'She'll be expectin' me,' he said anxiously, 'she's that cunning and wise, she knows by the birds and the animals the time of day, and understands the settler's clock better nor the settler himself.'

He lapsed into unconsciousness for awhile; after that he presently lifted his hand—

'Hark!' he said, 'didn't you hear something? It's such a little way to the foot of

the Black Gulch, you'd have heard her voice many a time in the tree, but for the birds she coaxed to come and play with her; often and often I've listened to 'em all chattering together, and you couldn't tell their voices apart. Where's Jack? Don't follow him, we were friends once; an' if some might blame him, I don't—he's given me the purest joy I ever knew in life—he always carried the luck in his pocket, and he turned it for me in something beyond the value of gold dust.'

After that he lay so still that the momentarily arrested life of the bush recovered itself and went on as before; overhead the magpie resumed his song like the playing of a very soft flute, and one by one the young forest animals stole up to see what it all meant, and peeped at the silent group of men who stood about that bright-coloured figure that lay on the ground.

Years afterwards these men would say to each other, 'Do you mind how that kangaroo rat tried to pick t'other one's pocket and got his ears box'd by the little 'un when Sam was dying?' Or, 'Did you see that 'possum dash up close to him, then dart away, as if scar'd like at the blood on his shirt?' Or, 'Darn'd if there ain't singing birds in the bush just the same as at home;' and so for a brief moment Sam's death opened up to them the poetry of the life that had always been a sealed book to them, though within a stone's throw of those who had never sought it, hard as the dying man had striven to make their eyes clear enough to perceive it.

Suddenly he opened his eyes, a light broke over his face, and he tried to raise his head. 'That's my sweetheart coming,' he said; 'don't you hear her?' but those around could hear nothing but the loud

awòck! awòck! of the tree locust above, nor when they strained their eyes in the direction in which Sam was gazing could they see a woman coming—all that they could make out was Bob approaching with a small bundle of something white in his arms, that as he approached, struggled down from him and ran towards Sam, crying 'Daddy! daddy!' and threw her little arms about his neck, and leaned her head against his cheek, with certain chuckles and greetings indicative of intense satisfaction and joy.

'Did ever you see such pretty curls?' said Sam, faintly, as he stroked them fondly, 'and the littlest feet! And this is my sweetheart, just rising two; and there's them as says there's wives that's dearer and luviner than sweethearts, but I never know'd 'em, no wife ever luv'd me like this little un does. An' when a man's called off

on a journey sudden like, without time to fix things straight and comfortable for them as he leaves behind, and that isn't old enough to fend for theirselves, why what does he do? He asks his friends to take care of it, jest as if it was their own sweethearts left lone-like in the world, and he thanks them all beforehand because he knows he can trust 'em; and Bob knows—Bob'll explain—'

His brow sank lower on the child's curly head, who laughed and held up her mouth to be kissed; and so with his sweetheart's lips on his, and with all that he loved on earth safe in his arms, Sam went home.

CHAPTER VI.

A KANGAROO RAT hopped up close, like a booted man on one leg, and scratched its head; then sat up on its tail and looked at the pair.

Overhead the laughing jackass broke out into his low, gurgling laugh, a kingfisher came and mocked him, and a lyre-bird hard by mocked the pair, so that the air was full of mirth. Nature's attitude was kindly and serene, with that added peacefulness that long association brings with the Sabbath day.

No one moved till the little one, lifting her head from Sam's shoulder, and climbing

higher on his breast came unexpectedly face to face with Long Jim, and considering him for a moment, stretched out her dimpled hand, and pulled softly at his beard, telling him confidentially that daddy had 'gone to bye-bye;' then, seized with shyness, retreated to the only refuge she had ever known, and refused to emerge from it when those around sought to coax her away, clinging to him with a strength against which that of the men around was as water.

They got her away at last, not knowing how; but even then she kept running back to him, though when they had lifted him up to carry him back to the Camp she ran quite trustfully beside him, babbling to him all the way, and thrusting into his drooping hand the treasures that on their way she happed upon.

But when they arrived, nothing would

quiet her but that she should be laid to her midday sleep beside him in the shanty, where, with her head upon his shoulder, and a half-eaten cake in her hand, she dropped asleep, and of all the rough men who crept in on tip-toe that day to see the pair, not one spoke loud enough to awaken her.

And when she woke, and allowed herself to be coaxed away to the meal that with infinite pains had been prepared, and was afterwards fed with, and waited upon by the Camp to a man, though she laughed at their bearded faces, and toddled from one to the other with prefect trust, she presently began to demand her daddy of them in a way that reduced the boldest among them to despair.

Sam was by now washed and neatly dressed in a fresh holiday suit. He had also been measured for the rough box that

was to serve him as a coffin, and would be buried at sundown; for without a word spoken the men shrunk from a repetition of the scene of the morning, when the living slumbered so peacefully by the dead.

He lay with such a happy look on his pale face, with the suddenly whitened hands, that had toiled so hard during his life, folded before him, that the little one who toddled in and out of the shanty where he was, seemed quite happy to leave him for a while, if only the door were left open that she might run back to him, offering him at intervals a bit of her cake, a gold-nugget, a flower—and so it came to pass that with all her little treasures slipped between his stiffening fingers, Sam was laid to his sleep, someone at the last moment adding to them a bit of her hair.

It was in one of those longer absences in which Yankee Bill had taught her to

rock his cradle, that Sam was placed in his coffin; but just before nailing down the lid, though no one ever seemed to know from whom the suggestion came, it was decided to be rough on the 'little 'un,' to put him away without giving her the chance of wishing him good-bye, and so she was brought in riding on Bill's shoulder; and to kiss Sam seemed to her such a little thing to do and so natural, but the fragrant flowers with which he was heaped, fixed her attention, and these she smelled and held to him to smell also, then, shaking her pretty head, and saying he had 'gone to bye-bye,' rode triumphantly away, taking a handful of those flowers with her that, withered though they might be, were the first dropped (upheld by Bill's arm) by her tiny hand upon Sam's coffin.

But when the rain of flowers fell thick and fast—for there was not a man who had

not procured his bit of green or blossom to do honour to Nature's faithful disciple—she clapped her hands and cried 'Pitty! Pitty!' but presently struggling down out of Bill's arms, trotted back towards the Camp, confident that she would find daddy in the shanty awaiting her return.

How that evening was got through the men never knew, but at last, worn out with sobbing, Sam's Sweetheart fell sound asleep in Bob's arms, who sat the night through, scarce daring to stir an eyelash or move a foot for fear of awakening her, while Long Jim, under pretence of not feeling sleepy, sat beside him.

Next morning the Camp announced its intention of adopting the child, and fitting up a shanty for her suitable accommodation, but against this arrangement Bob stood out inflexibly.

'That hadn't been Sam's intention,' he

said; 'he knew his late partner's wishes and all the circumstances that nobody else knew, and Sam's appeal to the Camp had only been made in case anything happened to himself (Bob), in whom a confidence, that perhaps he didn't deserve, had been reposed. But the little 'un being in his charge he knew how to take care of her; he didn't mind bringing her to the Camp every day for a spell if they'd mind what language they'd use—and if they wanted to be useful they could do his work while he was dry-nursing her—seeing that her little pinafores and sich must be washed, and got up in the same style as she was used to when Sam was alive. He did not see his way to getting a decent woman to mind her just now, but he'd keep his eyes open; only a decent woman would be sure to get married and have little 'uns of her own, and then where would be Sam's

Sweetheart? And if they wanted to see the sort of a place to which she had been used, quite a palace-like, and if they'd take an oath never to let out its whereabouts, why they could follow him, and then they'd never talk no more about locating her in that there pigsty—meaning the Camp.'

Whereupon some half-a-dozen of the men, being sworn to secresy, were led by a circuitous route, and, as if he were fearful of being watched, to the identical tree that had been the object of so many suspicious stories; and dividing the scrub and announcing that people who wished to follow must be humble, Bob went suddenly down on his hands and knees, and disappearing into the body of the tree, was followed up a rude ladder in the wall of it, to a little circular chamber built three-parts open to the sky and containing a tiny bed, a child's toys, a plentiful

assortment of little bowls and spoons complete; and ranged upon the wall beyond reach of her little hands, a cupboard that contained an abundance of food, carefully selected by Sam to meet the requirements of a very young child, the whole being garnished with whatever Sam had chanced upon of curious or beautiful in Camp or bush, and being farther decorated with an exquisite cornice of brilliant rose-colour, formed of bunches of pink everlastings, tied in bunches and arranged in a compact row.

'With every convenience, just as if she'd been born a princess,' said Bob, proudly, as he pointed out the irons and many necessaries of a child's nursery; but when it was suggested that she must have found it lonesome-like, and that it was dangerous, too, for such a young child, Bob replied that the door fastened safely on the out-

side, and he s'posed the skies wouldn't eat her; and as to being lonesome, she'd more company sometimes than she wanted. The birds treated her just like one of themselves, and so did the animals, who would talk to her for hours and hours together, as she to them; and then there were sunbeams dropping in at all sorts of odd moments for her to play with; and as to rain, Sam was too careful to bring her here until the rainy season was over, and he always meant to move homewards before the fall of the year came.

'We'll fix up the shanty for her handsomely by that time,' said Long Jim, eagerly; but Triangular Bob only shook his head, and then the men one by one stumbled down and out again, thinking that here at least Sam's sawyering had had practical results.

'But what call had he to hide her so

close?' said Yankee Bill; 'she ain't one to be ashamed on; and I'd give something to know what 'twas that Sam stole from Cucumber Jack — nothing that would do himself any good, I'll bet.'

'That was so,' said Bob, eagerly, adding more slowly, 'when a man loves something so that he'd give his heart's blood for it— but there don't seem no call for that, but only to get hold of a bit of writing that what he loves can't get for itself, but that'll make it grow up fair an' free, an' able to hold up its head with the best by-and-by —what does he do? First he tries to get it hon'ably; then he trys to buy it, and offers his whole pile for it, and when he finds he can't buy what's more than the life itself to what he loves, why, what does he do? He bides his time, and when the opportunity turns up he takes it, and he pays for it hon'ably with his blood—and a

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man can't do more; and if any writes up a thief's name on his grave he can 'ford to laugh at that, seeing he's left them that he loves the right side of the hedge. And that's all the explanation of Sam's reasons,' he added briskly, 'that you're ever likely to get from Triangular Bob.'

CHAPTER VII.

THEY found the little one sitting by daddy's grave (which had been made under the tree to which they had carried him to die), and alternately playing with the flowers that hid its brown surface, and stretching out her hands to the sunbeams, chuckling to herself all the time over some baby thought in her mind.

Throughout that day not a stroke of work was done by the Camp, the united efforts of some twenty men being devoted to the effort of keeping a two-year-old child from thought, and out of sight of the

mound of earth beneath which 'daddy' had fallen sound asleep.

But happy though she might be with them, the sudden sense of loss and strangeness would now and again pierce her heart; and though Triangular Bob developed an unexpected tenderness and skill in handling and soothing her, she seemed to miss something that he could not give; though when nightfall came, and Bob proposed to carry her home to her own little bed, in a fit of wilfulness she clung to Long Jim, and the matter ended by her being undressed and wrapped in the only clean shirt the Camp could muster, and laid in the bed Sam had been wont to occupy. There she soon fell sound asleep, with her hand in that of Triangular Bob, who slept on the ground, while Long Jim from time to time looked in to see that all was safe.

In its surmises that night over Bob's

charge, the guessers more than once stumbled on the truth, but passed it by—there were so many improbabilities connected with the idea—till at length the final decision come to was, that the child had been Sam's own, though for reasons best known to himself he had wished to disguise his paternity, and have it thought that he was sweethearting. Sam's eyes had been blue, and so were hers; and if it was objected that there were blues and blues, and that her complexion did not in the least resemble his, any more than did her features, a scornful inquiry from Yankee Bill as to whether young leaves were the colour of old ones, or a kitten precisely like a grimalkin, silenced such cavillers, till they found an unexpected ally in the Piny, who, looking up from his game of euchre, remarked—

'The child's Cucumber Jack's!'

There was a moment of surprise, then all the men began talking at once.

'Who told you so?' 'Always said a woman was at the bottom of the split between the two men.' 'She's got every one of his points.' 'To be sure he cut up rough about infanticide that night.' 'S'pose he killed his wife and deserted the child?' 'P'r'aps it was her marriage certificate Sam stole.' But when it turned out that the Piny had no facts to go upon, but only suspicions, the excitement dropped, though the idea remained.

'Didn't Sam tell us Jack had got a woman hid in the bush?' said the Piny, with a fine legal air; 'and didn't his partner almost a minute after come in and say she was his wife? Didn't Sam go off that very night to look for something or somebody, with Jack on his tracks next morning, and after that

was there ever a civil word between the two men? Most likely she died, and, being careless like about trifles, he forgot the child; but Sam, knowing that hinfants is the rule and not the exception in matrimony, took it into his head to go loafing round, and, finding the little un, r'ared her up without saying nothing to nobody—more especially Jack.'

'Darned if I don't believe the Piny's right,' said Yankee Bill, excitedly; 'and I shouldn't wonder if the little un's a dookess in her own right. Did ever you see a man with that knack of looking at you as if you were a long way off, using your langwidge, but with tones in his voice as made it sound different, and with a nat'ral taste for clean linen that looks like as if his father had had it afore him? I say did you ever see a man with them peculiarities who wer'n't somebody in his

own country—an' not exactly the sort of man as 'ud send home a colour'd orfspring to represent him?'

'She ain't coloured,' burst out Long Jim, who had just entered; 'she's as fair—as fair—' he paused for a simile—'as a daffy-down-dilly!'

'There's no knowing what she may be,' said Long Jim, airily. 'I've been told that I was uncommon fair in my inkfancy, though there ain't much to choose between me and a pickled walnut now. She may turn out as fine a color'd gal as her mother one of these days.'

But when this possibility was suggested to Triangular Bob next morning, it only drew from him the remark that, 'Guessing was easy, but facts were stubborn, and he'd like to know what Act of Parliament had been passed that forbade Sam having a child of his own?'

This unexpected spirit in a man of Triangular Bob's well-known meekness was almost as amazing to the Camp as the proficiency he displayed in his duties of dry-nursing the little 'un, 'as if he had been born to it,' as Yankee Bill said next morning when he found that the Triangular One had risen at three o'clock to wash her little socks and pinafores, while later on he prepared the breakfast with which he fed her upon his knee, as comfortable-like as if he had been her mother.

And here again the unerring sagacity of Sam's judgment was asserted; but the truth was, he had once discovered in Bob's way of handling and soothing a deserted aborigine baby such a capacity for parental insight as dwarfed all minor accomplishments in that one speciality. Only a man may have a speciality, yet never get a

chance of excelling in it, and perhaps Bob would have missed his *métier*, and lived and died in the obscurity of card-cheating and other objectionable but highly natural vices, had not the accident of Sam's death suddenly installed him in the honours of pseudo-fatherhood.

That day the child asked but once for her 'daddy,' for, alas! poor Sam was already almost forgotten in the baby heart that had owned him as sole sovereign, but that would come back to him again some day, giving him measure for measure of the tenderness that he had so freely lavished upon her.

At sundown she went off to her bower contentedly enough with Triangular Bob, kissing her little hands as she went to the men, who somehow felt that the evening business of gambling and drink

was stale and without excitement after the new experiences of the past three days.

They were eagerly watching for her next morning when Bob was seen approaching, carrying what looked like a miracle of whiteness, and with its little petticoats and tuckers smelling so exquisitely sweet, as showed how Bob had not forgotten to lay a sprig of orange-flowers between them when washed, 'Sam,' as he once remarked, 'having invariably walked a matter of ten miles to get them orange-flowers to drop on her clean clothes.'

For a moment Long Jim, first in the rush to meet her, stood at fault—how could he touch that whiteness without soiling it? But the little one solved the difficulty by running towards him, and those azure eyes, seeing neither dirt nor

uncleanliness in what she already loved, stole a velvet arm about his neck and laid her soft cheek against his bearded face, thrilling the heart of more than one rough fellow present with long-forgotten memories of innocence and hope.

Next day a determined effort at cleanliness was made by the entire Camp, but when it was discovered that she did not even notice the sacrifice made in her honour, but herself evinced so strong a predilection for dirt as bid fair to whiten the locks of Triangular Bob, the attempt at personal regeneration was abandoned, and only an extra vigour infused into the following Sunday's wash.

The Triangular One, as groom of the chambers and worthy successor to Sam, displayed that attention to his person that was becoming; but as Long Jim remarked,

'when it came to sitting up night after night to do the little 'un's washing and clear-starching, an extra shirt or two thrown into the tub did not kick up any considerable dust.'

CHAPTER VIII.

Bob had been right in his decision that the bower was a more suitable abode for her than the Camp. Those wholesome nights, spent almost in the open air, with the sky for canopy; those pure fresh mornings, to which she was awakened by the fluty carols of the break-of-day bird, brought her health, while through the lattice-work of the boughs, the life-giving sun shone on her, strengthening each fibre of her body.

And the brilliant stars taught her the lesson of patience, and the weird whispers of the she-oak, borne to her on the shiver-

ing of the breeze, conveyed to her the secrets of the forest; so that when a great wind came roaring up from the south, crashing through the far woods, and audible in mighty tones for many a mile before it stirred the foliage above her, she knew no fear, nor turned trembling from the breast of the great earth-mother to hide herself on any human one.

And the flowers spoke to her day and night by their scents, as varying as the notes of the birds who talked to her in their own way; and to see her with a rosella dancing up and down on her hand, and twittering his little song close to her face, or a lyre-bird perched on her dimpled shoulder, imitating in succession every note of the other birds, was, as Bob often declared, 'the angelicalest sight that ever he see.'

For the Piping Crow—who, dropping in

now and then as a casual visitor, had at length domiciled himself altogether with the child—Bob had a great regard, as on the slightest alarm, or the approach of any one to the bower, the bird would set up an incessant screaming noise, easily audible in the Camp, until the intruder had either retreated or been recognised as a friend. But as to the moral influence of the creature on Sam's Sweetheart, Bob had his doubts.

Its impudent eye squinting up at one sideways, its loud calling out under a sense of injury, and its unprincipled and shrike-like habit of killing anything eatable that approached him, not to mention his knack of opening the cupboard and bringing out food for himself and mistress at odd times, made Bob wonder once or twice whether Sam would have approved of such a bad example to the little 'un.

It was Bob's delight to cheat the Camp out of the hour it most valued during the day, and, on the plea that her health required it, to carry the child out to some safe spot where she would toddle to and fro, talking to herself or any stray acquaintance she might fall in with, and bringing her treasures of flowers and stones to where he sat wrestling with some piece of mending, his tongue in his cheek, his brows knitted, his rough hands pricked all over with the needle that was so much more formidable a weapon to handle than a revolver.

It was during one of these protracted struggles that, one evening, when he had made an excursion into the bush, Bob, on looking up, discovered the little 'un to have mysteriously disappeared.

He dropped the sock, and ran like one distracted in search of her, but had not

gone many yards before he discovered her in the middle of a small open space, holding her little skirts up, and gravely dancing opposite a native companion, who was figuring away, devoting his whole energies to dancing and pirouetting, throwing up one leg in the air in the most graceful manner, and in every respect conducting himself as an accomplished and polite partner, till, suddenly fatigued, he tumbled on the ground feet uppermost, ruffling his feathers and upsetting the little 'un, who rolled beside him, for all the world, as Bob declared, like two frolicsome puppies.

He related this tale in Camp that night; also how he had once carried her a long way into the forest and hidden her behind a tree, that she might watch the satin-birds at play in their bowers.

'She never spoke a word,' said Bob, proudly; 'but just peeped round at the

birds, wistful-like, as they went dancing in and out of the playing-place, as if they was boys and girls out for a spree, and she'd like to join 'em, till all at once she ran towards 'em; and do you think they was skeered like, or seem'd to mind her, though they're the shiest animiles in the bush? Not a bit of it! They seemed right down glad to see her, and she just dropped into her place, only she was too big to go through the bowers, and they seemed to know it, and didn't go through theirselves, but just danced round and round through the avenue they'd made, just as sportive and playful as you please. And when she stopped, and peeped inside, and put out her little hand and touched the bones, and feathers, and shells, and sich with which they'd decorated it, darn'd if the birds didn't do the honours like, and seem'd to want to show her what a deal of trouble it

had cost 'em to fix up things in that style; and to be sure the building of that there bower—as generations has danced through and 'll dance again—'ud put to shame many a carpenter what thinks he knows his work. P'r'aps 'twas the little 'un's eyes being a lovely blue like them birds' own, or it's the way she's got of talking to 'em; but when I beckoned to her—for I kep' out of sight all the time—they seem'd right down sorry to lose her, following us for a longish bit through the bush, and I don't believe played any more that blessed evening.'

Many more tales he might have told to these eager and respectful listeners of the little one's—

Infantine
Familiar clasp of things Divine,

had not something about this time hap-

pened that for a time gave Bob a scare of those distant excursions, and caused the mere sight or thought of the bush to turn him sick with remembered dread.

Having left her as usual for the afternoon with the Piping Crow in charge, Bob, returning at tea-time to fetch her to the Camp, was thunderstruck to find the door open and the bower empty, though a tiny shoe at the bottom of the ladder seemed to tell that there had been some sort of a struggle in her departure.

Bob stood stricken, his limbs trembling beneath him, trying to persuade himself that that infernal bird must have managed to open the door in the same fashion that he was wont to pick the lock of the larder, and, hopping downstairs before her, had inspired the child with the idea of playing truant (for that other awful possibility, which he never for a moment forgot, was

not to be thought of); then rushed back to the Camp pale as death with his intelligence.

Some of the men's faces went almost as white as his, when they saw him come running, and with empty arms, towards them, they left their cradles and met him halfway, turning back with him towards the bush when they heard his news. Some thought of Jack, others thought her peril to be greater if she had wandered alone into the bush, where a child, beguiled from point to point by new and strange discoveries, might, at the distance of fifty yards, become as lost to her friends as if at a hundred miles' distance.

'There's the Lirk,' almost sobbed the Triangular One, as he flew along, 'that just lies in your path like a log, and never moves even if you step on it, but just bites and kills—and she's got no fear

of insecks (all that was not animal was insect to Bob in the natural kingdom); she'd as like as not take it up in her pretty hand—and what will Sam say if he's a-looking down on her this blessed minute, and can't do nothing to help her?'

But Long Jim pinned his faith to the Piping Crow, and sure enough, after half-an-hour's agonising search, a long drawn out coo-ëë, through whose pathos sounded an unmistakable note of triumphant mockery, drew both men, all desperate with hope and fear, to where, under a blue gum, with one bare foot on a clump of grass, and a Prickly Devil sound asleep on her lap, sat Sam's Sweetheart, the Piping Crow beside her, his impudent eye cocked at her plaything with an expression of intense disapproval.

Bob stood trembling for a minute, then

burst out crying like a child, and snatching up her, and the Prickly Devil alike (a harmless enough lizard, in spite of his terrible appearance), swore that never again would he let her out of his sight from one day's end to another.

Perhaps it was the impossibility of his doing this so long as she remained in the bower; perhaps because a rumour got abroad that Jack, in his new character of Bushranger, had been heard of in the neighbourhood; but the very next day Bob brought her down to the shanty that had been hastily cleaned and decked in her honour, and settling her things, including the Piping Crow, as comfortably as circumstances permitted, dared to breathe in the thought that for the present she was safe.

But all offers of assistance from the lawful and unlawful families then in the

settlement he steadily repulsed, and even when instruction was offered him in that crucial test in which he had hitherto broken down — the darning of her tiny open-worked socks — he indignantly declined, till finding that his cobblings actually blistered the child's soft feet, he one day solemnly placed her in the charge of Long Jim, and departed into the bush, where, from a half-civilised gin, he laboriously learned the difficult accomplishment, returning triumphant at sun-down, with the first real darn he had ever accomplished safe in his pocket.

CHAPTER IX.

Now was the happiest season of the Camp, when, in addition to the lawful pleasure of the little 'un's society at regular times, anybody hanging round Bob's shanty at odd moments might be rewarded by a peep of a little soft brown head, and a pair of blue eyes that would dance at the sight of the bearded faces peeping in at the crazy window where, during the heat of the day, she slept or played, with the inevitable Piping Crow keeping watch beside her.

Often a brawny arm, innocent of shirt-sleeves, and with no apparent body belong-

ing to it, would swoop down with unexpected gifts of sweetmeats, procured from Melbourne by the Express-man at almost their weight in gold; or she would awaken from her mid-day nap to find something on her little bed that had not been there when she fell asleep, and that her henchman, with a strict sense of honour that he never displayed towards any one else, would not touch till she awoke; which circumstances being duly appreciated by the Camp, caused it to view the bird with a respect that he most assuredly neither desired nor deserved.

But sweetmeats being discouraged by Bob, and 'something green' considered more suitable to her tender years, John Chinaman, established on the outskirts of the diggings, close to the river, might have shut up shop for ever on the amount of gold dust brought him for the cabbages,

salads, and melons that he appeared to produce out of air and water alone.

Graceful, industrious, frugal, despised, making an excellent husband to the woman who condescends to be better dressed by him than perhaps any woman of her class under the sun, John is distinctly and above all other accomplishments (even his superior capacity for swindling) the first gardener in the world.

He has but to appear in the neighbourhood of water (for the soil, whether of a hot sandy loam, or sterile clay, is a matter of equal indifference to him), and almost in a night, a vividly green enclosure springs up, of which the dwelling-place, built in a corner of it, is the least important consideration. But he cannot work miracles, and when one day Long Jim appeared, and, thrusting a bag of gold dust into his hand, told John that it was his, if he

would bring up a dish of strawberries fit for eating by that day week, Yankee Bill having promised the little 'un a dish of green peas, and Jim feeling bound to go a cut higher, John, moving in the dress of his country, among his beloved tanks of manure, and the endless canals that irrigated his garden, could only shake his head and confess with humiliation that he could not grow the berry without roots. Upon which Long Jim, fiercely demanding what was the good of a pile if a man couldn't buy what he liked with it, more particularly a few rubbishy berries, farther proceeded to heap the luckless celestial with such contumely that the latter was driven into retorting with that weapon which in John is as equally effective as in a woman.

But when, five minutes later, Yankee Bill rushed in, swearing that green peas

within a week he must have, or die, firmly convinced that at the bottom of John's vast watering-pot lurked cucumbers, pine-apples, and even oranges, that were to be had for the asking, John almost tore out his magnificent pig-tail in despair, and felt that till he had 'rose' those strawberries and peas, he would never be able to hold up his head again.

Next day the Express-man bore a beautifully-worded epistle from John to a friend in Melbourne imploring him to send, even if it cost a fortune, some strawberry roots and sowing peas; but, alas! when at length they arrived and had come up, thereby restoring peace to the Celestial One's bosom, the little 'un was away and Long Jim gone far beyond the happiness of carrying to her the precious berries upon which he had so set his heart.

Bob made no objection to these green

delicacies, but when she seemed to droop with the heat, he set his face steadily against any sort of medicine, and a seidlitz powder, that Yankee Bill once sought surreptitiously to administer under the deceitful guise of sherbet, made such a commotion in the camp as but narrowly stopped short of bloodshed.

'The forest animiles don't take medicine,' said Bob, scornfully, 'or go a meddling with the insides that God A'mighty made, and 'll set to right Himself when He's got a little spare time—time and fresh air is Providence's two doctors, and the only two I ever knowed who met without falling out with one another.'

Once, when a slight touch of sunstroke and fever had laid the child low, and trifling danger had been exaggerated by the almost frenzied men into a matter of life and death, some of the women of the

neighbouring camp came 'loafing round,' as Bob expressed it, with offers of help. He packed them off instantly, as if, poor souls!—though they had no characters—they had also no hearts to be moved by the child's situation.

But from the first Bob had seen that, unless put down by a strong hand, the men's impulse of love and pity towards Sam's Sweetheart might spread in waves of kindliness towards less worthy members of her sex, that, unchecked, would end in a state of things that could not fail to prove a source of contamination to the little 'un in the end. Most vices are virtues in excess, and in their new opinion of women for the child's sake, these men were likely to come a cropper over their best instincts, finding something to admire in even the plainest of the women, who would hang round (when Bob was out of

the way) on pretence of asking news of their idol.

There were handsome men in the Camp, the fact, too, that hitherto their threshold had been hallowed ground made the pursuit all the more attractive, till one day, at smoking time, a certain frail and beautiful Peggy, boldly crossing the rubicon, under pretence of bearing a present of fruit to the little 'un, not a single man rose to repulse her.

Perhaps the roundness of her young curves in some way resembled the child's dimpled beauty, so that she looked like its elder sister, perhaps the girl's gentleness and grace as she coaxed it to approach her, touched the hearts of the men gathered round her, but when a kiss from Yankee Bill, ostensibly intended for the little one, somehow lost itself on the roundness of Peggy's cheek, it was as

well, perhaps, that Bob at that moment appearing, and snatching the child from her arms, should drive the fair and frail one beyond a boundary that she was never suffered a second time to cross.

When Bob had carefully washed and redressed the child to free her from the defilement of Peggy's touch, he returned alone to the men and made the following speech: 'Choose between 'em,' he said, sternly. 'If you want any of that sort here, have 'em by all means, but me and the little 'un 'll clear out to-morrow. Sich company ain't fit for Sam's Sweetheart, and sich company she sha'n't have so long as I'm alive and can prevent it. Just you make your minds up, and let me know when convenient.'

Whereupon he walked off, and for a whole day starved the Camp of a sight of

its darling, after which, on the men making an unconditional surrender, he restored her to them, and without a murmur bore the sight of the ruin of that clear starching, which had been a morning's work.

But one day a handsome Maori woman, tall, erect, and not yet much past middle age, entered the Camp, and boldly demanded of Triangular Boo that the child should be given up to her, as she was its grandmother, and would guard and tend it well.

But Bob had got his instructions from Sam, and having very little belief in the permanent humanity of a savage, declined to part with the child, whereupon (as he said afterwards) he got the taste of a tongue that reminded him of the finest efforts of the individual whom for the mere sake of peace he had knocked on the head, and so for ever silenced.

'The tarnation thing of it all was the old savage's knowing English,' Bob would say. 'I'm darned if she musn't have smarted some through the whites before she could slang a man like that in his own vernacular; and blessed if she didn't go off swearing she'd get the child yet, for she'd rather leave it to wild beasts than the tender mercies of the whites!'

But the other men laughed at his fears, and the extra care he took of Sam's Sweetheart after this visit; they knew how to shield their own, and were at this time full of a wild dream of making the child its heiress, sending her out into the world as the representative of its wealth, when she would be able to suit herslf with anything, from a duke downwards, that might please her fancy.

But it was felt that an heiress must have a name—and a stray parson hap-

pened to wander that way (instantly claimed by the Piping Crow as a man and a brother from the similarity of their vestments and a certain covert air of disreputableness common to both), it was proposed that she should be duly christened under such names as the Camp might decide on.

But Bob quietly remarking that Sam's Sweetheart she had been called from the beginning, and Sam's Sweetheart she should remain to the end, the proposed rite of christening ended, I regret to say, in the two gentlemen of pied plumage getting extremely drunk in each other's company to the intense delight and amusement of the whole Camp.

CHAPTER X.

FOR a considerable time before this disgraceful occurrence, the conduct of the Pied Piper (as he was now called) had been a cause of considerable anxiety to Bob. Though put to bed regularly each night at the same time as the child, and to all appearance sound asleep under the coverlid beside her, when Bob himself sought his mattress and blanket in a corner, the bird had got into a habit of dropping round at the neighbouring camps (carefully eschewing his own) where he was always received with that welcome to which

his wit and brilliant powers of companionship entitled him.

A place of honour was invariably assigned to him on the table, whence he would follow each movement of the game, alternately blessing himself with intense fervour, or consigning his valued person to eternal perdition, according to the ejaculations of the players, even imitating them so far as to take an occasional sip out of the nearest tumbler of grog that, repeated once too often, sufficed to send him home at daybreak with a swagger in his walk beyond that with which nature had gifted him. His extraordinary powers of mimicry made the learning of a song a mere joke to him, and when in his fine piping notes and in admirable time and tune he would give 'Sally of our Alley,' and, alas! many far less respectable ditties, the men would shout with laughing, and swear that the

spirit of Cucumber Jack had come back in the bird, and was wasted on such a 'methody' camp as the one up yonder had become.

How he managed to convey, as he did, that he was out on the sly, and that he considered it a point of honour in the company he honoured with his presence not to peach on him, nobody knew. Perhaps it was his sidelong way of entering, turning his impudent eye this way and that, and scanning each face before he would take his accustomed place; perhaps because on dropping in at a distant camp one evening he had, on discovering the presence of the Piny, disappeared as though he had been shot, nor reappeared in his accustomed haunts for many days afterwards.

Of course the Piny, who had not been bound over by the bird to secresy, went back and told the others, who laughed

at the cleverness of the creature, but by tacit consent did not tell Bob, to whom the lamentable decadence in his deputy's morals was only revealed by the accident of his rising very early one morning on some mending or clear starching business, and so surprising the Pied Piper, letting himself in by the latch-key of a hitherto unsuspected hole in the roof.

The extreme disorder of his person and uncertainty of his gait Bob at first ascribed to illness, especially when the bird rolled over on to his back with its feet stiffly uppermost, and feigned death, though the twinkling, cunning eye that he forgot to close, soon convinced Bob that he was shamming, and discovered to him the real state of the case. It was on the Triangular One's picking him up and cuffing him soundly, that quite inadvertently the Piper let drop a word or two that so

alarmed Bob as to place the bird in peril of his life; for how was that blessed child to grow up fair and free and a credit to his bringing up, so long as her innocent ears were made a sink for that rapscallion's iniquity?

Bob tried to think what Sam would have done under the circumstances. Sam had been firm, very firm; Bob thought he would have killed the bird—for her good of course, though she did love it so; and it was almost as pretty to see the two together as if the Piper were as handsome as a rosella—but her morals must be kept uncontaminated, and it was enough to turn a man's hair grey to expect her each time she opened her lips to repeat one of the Pied Piper's blasphemies.

So, without saying a word to anybody, for he knew the Camp to a man would be against him, Bob got up very early one

morning to await the arrival of the doomed bird, who, after a week's good conduct, burst out again in a reckless course of dissipation that defied restraint. It was broad day when a scraping on the wooden roof without announced the return of the prodigal, who, as he dropped on the floor, too plainly betrayed that he had been spending his evening not wisely, but too well.

But drunk though he might be, his habit of taking the bearings of things in general, soon discovered Bob to him, not asleep in his bed as usual, but sitting by the side of it, and with an evident intention in his early rising, that could not possibly be lost on a bird of such striking wit and penetration.

The poor Piper stood quaking, saw the bit of string in Bob's hand ready for his hanging, then with his bright eye fixed the

while on his intending executioner, sidled away towards his mistress's bed, which he climbed all trembling, and crossing the coverlid as if it had been a limitless desert, beyond which was safety (for by merely stretching out his arm Bob could have seized him) he stole shivering into the arms of Sam's Sweetheart, who, half-wakening, folded them closer about the trembling bird, and not even Bob's courage was equal to snatching the unworthy guest from that innocent city of refuge.

He kept very close to her for days and nights after that, even sleeping with one eye always open upon Bob, but the latter had long ago repented of his intention on the bird's life, and having fixed up a stout cage just over the child's bed, shut him up in it each day at sundown, so that virtue became a matter of necessity, and not of choice, with the Pied Piper.

But Bob had more important things just then to exercise his mind, and now definitely announced his intention of leaving the diggings shortly, without thinking it necessary to add that he was only waiting for the arrival of the escort that at intervals came to carry their gold-dust to Melbourne, to set out.

It was not so long ago that a man who dared to cross the temper of the Camp would have been silenced by a bullet through his heart; but now, when only one small insignificant man threatened to take from it the very joy of its eyes, he was threatened with no violence, or even abuse, only by every argument in its power he was besought to leave her with them till at least the following spring.

But Bob, sheltering himself behind the inevitable Sam, swore that a sacred charge had been reposed in him, and certain in-

structions must be carried out to the letter, and it being a matter of her safety and future welfare, it would be an act of base selfishness on their part to try and keep her in the Camp.

'Cucumber Jack may come up with me one of these days,' he would say, 'or the river may rise this fall, and wash away the whole b'iling of you, and then where 'ud be Sam's Sweetheart; and who's to answer to Sam for her?'

But they would answer that a camp was surely equal to one man, and that they would build her a shanty far above the rising of the river, and would urge that the open air life and splendid climate suited her far better than life in that poky little island out yonder could do, and finally Bob was delicately reminded that for certain reasons before mentioned, he was debarred from visiting those shores to

which he could not possibly send the little 'un alone.

Bob did not think it necessary to explain that Long Jim would accompany him, but both men knew that when the time for starting came, there would be a struggle for the possession of the child that could scarcely fail to end in bloodshed.

In those days, perhaps, because waking and sleeping they were in such terror of losing her, Sam's Sweetheart was scarcely for an hour of the day out of sight of the men. They would kiss her little hand, stroke her pretty head, and with desperate fondness coax her to linger beside them, asking her if she wished to go away and leave them, to which she would cry out, 'No! no!' and clasp her little arms about their brown necks in perfect trustfulness and love. Bob's heart would sometimes sink at the contemplation of how she would

miss all this devoted tenderness in the life before her, and, but for his promise to Sam, would gladly have lived on with her at the Camp. But within a week of the arrival of the expected escort, something occurred that proved Sam's judgment had been sound as usual, when he had charged Bob to convey her to a place of safety, and that seemed to justify the nervous horror of the bush that the latter had felt ever since the memorable day of the child's loss in it.

It happened that one evening, when she seemed pining for fresh air, they had carried her out to a pleasant spot a mile beyond the settlement, where they sat in a group, smoking their pipes and watching the child as she played about, bringing them from time to time the flowers she had plucked. Autumn was on the brink of revealing herself, but not in the glowing colours of the home island; here the preva-

lence of evergreen trees and shrubs caused but little perceptible difference in the aspect of the landscape, save that the grass had dried up to a yellow colour resembling that of hay, and contrasting strongly with the deep green foliage of the trees.

'Look at her!' Long Jim exclaimed, fondly, as she ran to and fro, 'did ever you see such p'ints in all your days? Them narrow little feet and hands, and that little proud, sweet mouth—not a bit of conceit about it, but a heap of high breeding—and them straight delicate brows over two bits of heaven, lookin' at you all gentle an' sperrity in one; but what's come to the animals?' he added, anxiously, as the little one, after vainly trying to coax an opossum to approach her, burst into tears at the sight of him marching off, rich brown tail erect, and showing little bare paws that had the look of tiny feet with soft

white gloves or stockings on. For, alas! the child was already out of tune with the forest and its creatures, and the fine sympathy between her and them was broken; already her perceptions were dulled of their exquisite delicacy, and human tones had deafened her ears to those subtle chords of nature she had hearkened to from her birth.

'Ungrateful beasts!' cried Yankee Bill, indignantly, struck with this proof of heartlessness in one of her former companions; and the men were one and all trying to soothe her, when, from behind an adjacent tree, Cucumber Jack, in bushranger's dress, sauntered quietly into their midst, and, with a smile on his pale, handsome face, wished them all a very good evening.

His old reckless atmosphere of daredevilry seemed to overshadow all as he approached; save the little innocent child,

who, attracted by his accoutrements, and with the Pied Piper by her side, ceased crying, and ran towards him, the bird harassing his legs, screaming out lustily the while, being the only male present who did not stiffen in his tracks at the sight of the new comer, or evince any emotion whatever beyond the natural one of wishing to know what he meant by the intrusion.

Cucumber Jack looked down on the child with an intentness of regard that committed her every feature to memory, then quietly remarked, as if to himself—

'So that's Sam's Sweetheart.'

Those who had the presence of mind to look from one to the other, afterwards declared that in every line and feature, allowing for the different-coloured hair, the two faces were exactly identical, but it all passed so quickly that by the time the men, shaking off the spell of amazement

that held them, had started up, Cucumber Jack had vanished in the grove of trees behind him like a puff of smoke.

It was afterwards declared that the Pied Piper had so successfully taken the measure, both moral and physical, of Sam's murderer, that the mere sight of a man with gold or sandy-coloured hair would put him into a fury, so that he even made a dead set at a former boon companion of his own, and was with difficulty prevented from pecking his eyes out.

Upon reaching the Camp that evening Bob seemed in no hurry to carry off the child; but when the men were settled to their pipes and grog, with the little un' on Sam's barrel, and the Piper, who was clearly of opinion that things were brightening, and a little lawful amusement better than none, beside her, Bob cleared his throat, but instead of beginning a song as the bird ex-

pected, said in tones to which the old timidity seemed to have returned—

'Not being able to explain—for once by whiles things go round like as if of their own accord, and sometimes a man may have a sweetheart, an' he'll tell her his secrets when he's awake, or he may have a wife and let his secrets out while he is asleep—and nothing being safe that's once spoken, and more hanging on the little un' over there than you'll ever guess—still it ain't going beyond my instructions to tell you it's a matter of life and death that she don't get into the clutches of Cucumber Jack, and what Sam could play so high for as to stake his life upon it, why, it ain't for you or me to let a bit of sentiment come between her and her rights. And so, meaning no offence to nobody, I hope the Camp won't place no obstacles between my taking her, the first safe opportunity, up to Melbourne.'

'D—— Cucumber Jack!' cried Long Jim, suddenly, and forgetting the child, and 'D—— him!' echoed the Pied Piper, running from one glass to another, and dipping his beak in each.

'Look at him!' cried Bob, suddenly checked in his thoughts by perceiving the bird's conduct, 'there's one of her guardians, and a glass of grog 'ill settle *him*—and I'm the other, and one of Cucumber Jack's bullet's 'ud settle *me*, and the Camp may be a-moving on one of these days—or any night he might walk in, and just carry her off—and safety for her there's none, till she's put beyond his reach.'

There was no immediate reply, only a peal of laughter from the child, as she pointed to the Piper, who was now walking round the table and helping himself liberally out of every glass without even attempting to keep up appearances.

'As a camp,' remarked Yankee Bill, slowly, 'I reckon I'm not far abroad when I say that we'd give all the gold Cucumber Jack's luck ever brought into it, p'r'aps a ton first and last, reckoning the nuggets—I say we'd give it back to him in a waggon-load this minute for the right to put a bullet through his wicked heart—for taking one thing with another, he seems to have behaved dishonourable to the little 'un's mother, who, though coloured, may have had her feelings same as if she'd took after her daughter, which is alabaster. And he didn't kill Sam in fair fight, and the man who does the unhandsome thing deserves to be treated the same way himself. So you've only to say the word,' and he nodded towards Triangular Bob, 'and I'll make it my business to find and fasten a quarrel on him, and kill him, too, if it'll keep the little 'un any safer, God bless her!'

'God bless her!' echoed the Pied Piper, solemnly, and rolling slightly in his walk.

But Bob shook his head.

'You'd be doing more harm than you knowed of,' he said; 'and when she grew up she might hate you for it (though I'm not saying he's her father). The best revenge you can take on Sam's death, and the best you can do for Sam's Sweetheart, is to help me to get her safe off, my friend Long Jim having promised to take her from Melbourne to England, and place her with them as 'll do the right thing by her, as Sam wished.'

This was the first intimation that had been received of Long Jim's intention of following the child's fortunes, and the jealousy of the other men showed in their eyes as they looked at him.

'One of us might drop,' said Long Jim, apologetically; 'it don't much matter which

of us Cucumber Jack pots, so long as there's another one left to carry on the business, and, so to speak, see the child safe.'

Perhaps the Camp thought that now its strongest member had sided with Bob, it was useless to struggle longer against their darling's departure; and perhaps it was this tacit but unwilling consent to it, that presently brought them crowding around her when, half asleep in Bob's arms, she kissed her favourites, and wished them good night.

'She'll never be as precious to anybody over there, as she's been to us,' said Yankee Bill, bitterly, as he sat down again at the dirty boards that did duty for a table.

'Reckon we'll make our piles and go over and jine her,' said the Piny, cheerfully. 'She ain't one to be ashamed of us; and who knows but what she may want taking care of over there, just as much as if she was here? And if we're

going to sit up all night watching for the Cucumber, why a hand of cards 'll do us more good than snivelling over what can't be helped.'

And any one who had glanced in half an hour later, would have said that these rough-looking men had not a thought of life beyond their coarse gains; while outside yonder shanty a man lurked, fiercely watching, and with his thumb on the trigger of a half-cocked revolver.

CHAPTER XI.

Two days later the Express-man brought news of the Cucumber's having been seen at Melbourne in the act of embarkation for New Zealand.

Triangular Bob breathed freely, and was even able to turn his attention to a little clear starching; but Long Jim never relaxed his vigilance for a moment, muttering that 'ships might sail, but boats sometimes put back, and it would be an early bird that got up in the morning before Cucumber Jack.'

But on the third evening, as the two men sat together—Bob doing some bit of

mending, while Jim smoked his pipe, the child being asleep in her corner, having said her usual prayer, 'Please, God, bless Sam's Sweetheart and all Sam's Sweetheart's friends, and Long Jim and the Piper,' to which the latter, hopping round, responded, 'Amen!'—it happened that before they had finished their first glass of grog, Bob fell sound asleep with his darning-needle in his hand, while Jim had not time even to remove the pipe from his mouth before he too fell forward with his head upon the table.

Within earshot of the camp, and relying on themselves, the two men (the hour being so early) had neglected to bar the shanty for the night, so that when some hours later, Long Jim, with a violent start, awoke, it was to find the door set open, and the child and the Pied Piper, gone.

Jim stood for a moment stupidly staring,

then roughly shook, and with difficulty, awakened Bob, who, struggling up, and brandishing his darning-needle, glared wildly around, but was incapable of perceiving his loss.

'Drugged, by heaven!' muttered Long Jim in an undertone, and dragged his companion along with him to the gambling-room of the Camp, on the threshold of which he stopped as if bewitched, for fondly hugged up in Yankee Bill's arms was a little bundle of drapery, that could not be anything (there being but one child in the world to Long Jim) but Sam's Sweetheart.

The men looked up from their cards in wonder at the two scared figures before them; but it was Kentuck Piny who took upon himself the task of explanation.

'I looked up,' he said, 'from the darndest hand of cards that was ever foisted on an innocent, and thinking the little 'un out of

the way, I let out a big double D, and the next moment heard what seemed my own voice in the doorway, and, lookin' up, what should I see but the Pied Piper, strutting in, like as if he was a master of ceremonies; and just behind him, holding up her little night gownd, and her face all rosy, and the sleep still in her eyes, Sam's Sweetheart, dancing along like music over the floor, jest as if somebody was a-leading of her, and she a-listening to him, as if she loved him.'

'And it *was* Sam,' struck in Long Jim, excitedly. 'He knew her to be in danger, though them as was watching her didn't; and he just took her by the hand in her sleep, and led her in here, where he knew she'd be safe; and then he went up top again. But he'll come back, as sure as fate, when he's wanted.'

'What's the danger?' said the Downy

One, looking up. 'You and Long Jim fell asleep over your grog; and the Piper wanted a change, and tempted the little 'un out, and that's about the whole b'iling of it,' he added, returning to the contemplation of his cards.

'It's easy work falling asleep when you're dead beat,' said Long Jim, calming suddenly, as he caught the eyes of a comparatively new comer to the Camp, a man unfavourably known to the rest for his ostentatiously religious tendencies. 'So it's you, is it?' he muttered, as he stooped to lift the child out of Bill's arms, and remarking to the company in general that if they heard any shots that night, perhaps they'd 'drop round,' walked off, followed by Bob, and the unwilling Piper.

But when they regained the shanty, Long Jim locked and barred the crazy door, and drawing a thick curtain across

the broken window sat down to examine his own and Bob's revolvers. He found what he had expected, that they had been tampered with, and their charges drawn.

'Darn that old Sanctity!' said Long Jim, piously, as he repaired the damage done, and caused Bob to somewhat recover his wits by plunging his head into cold water, after which, extinguishing the light, the two men sat down—one at the door, the other at the window—to watch till morning.

In that darkest hour of the night, that is just on the edge of day, and before the faintest sound from without could convey its warning, an arm thrust aside the curtain from the window, and a shot, aimed too high to hit either of the men, was fired.

They stirred neither hand nor foot—perhaps the sickening thought, that the

next shot might strike the head on the pillow, for the moment paralysed them; then Long Jim, whispering hoarsely, 'She'd miss you most—and I never could manage clear starching,' thrust one of his revolvers into Bob's hand, and groped his way to the bed, where he lay down so as to shield her body with his own.

In the same moment a light held by some one without was flashed upon him as he lay—a report rang out, and simultaneously was heard the rush of approaching steps from the Camp, mingling with the screams of the Pied Piper, who was shouting 'Fire away! Fire away!' like mad.

In the darkness and confusion the assailants escaped, and though the Piny afterwards swore that they were savages, and that, unless disguised, the Cucumber was not present, it was argued that he

could not possibly be sure of it, but, for the moment, less was thought of pursuit than of desperate anxiety to know what had happened behind that locked door, and from which, now that the bird was out of breath, not a sound issued. But when they had forced it, and a light was struck, they found nothing worse than a half-stupified man sitting by the window with a revolver in each hand, and on the bed a man with a bullet through his heart, and a smile on his face, holding in his arms a sleeping child.

CHAPTER XII.

THE day and hour of the departure of Sam's Sweetheart from the Camp had arrived. Since daybreak the scene had been one of restless activity and movement, but now all was ready, the gold-dust strongly secured against attack, and deposited in the iron-bound waggon that was to form the centre of the escort, and only the insignificant absence of a two-year-old child was delaying the start.

The Camp had been for the past half-hour hanging round the door of a certain shanty, and from it presently issued Bob

carrying a beautiful little creature, who laughed and held out her skirt to show the men its smartness; then, struck by the unusual excitement beyond, ran towards the waggon and its brightly accoutred escort. Not a man stirred of those she had left behind; not one of them, for his life's sake, could have lifted his voice to call her back. Helpless and wretched, they watched the little white figure recede, but could hardly believe their good fortune when suddenly it turned, and came running back to them like the wind, looking over her shoulder as though in fear of those strange faces that she had approached. No one quite knew who caught her up first, or whose was the last good-bye pressed upon her; but the freshness of her pretty frock was gone long before Bob carried her away, though if her little face and hands bore

marks of those honest, tender kisses, I think she was none the worse for them.

Perhaps some vague perception of the trouble of their hearts touched her; for never had that little arm clung so fondly, or the tender lips given back kiss for kiss so earnestly, as in this ignorant moment of parting, and when at last Bob, pale as death, resolutely took her in his arms and walked away, the low sob, strangled in its birth, that issued as from one breast, might have half broken the child's heart could she have understood it.

But she only laughed, and kissed her little hand to them over Bob's shoulder, perhaps wondering why they did not follow. Being presently swallowed up in the bustle of the departure, that distant knot of men, not stirring from where it stood, strained its eyes in vain for another glimpse of her.

But on the very verge of the Bush, a hoarse voice shouting to the *cortége* to stop, made the men turn in their saddles, to see a man without his hat, and carrying something in his hand, hurrying towards them.

'It's her doll,' he said, hoarsely, and handed up to the child a battered torso that she seized with a cry of joy, and without a glance or a thought to the man who had restored it to her.

'Right!' said Yankee Bill, falling back.

'Right!' echoed a voice ahead.

The horses strained at their load; the child laughed, and hugged her doll; the Pied Piper, safe in his cage at her feet, rapped out an angry oath; and in a few seconds, and to the group of men who watched from below, the Bush had for ever closed upon her whom they had called Sam's Sweetheart; and not until hours

later was it discovered that Yankee Bill had sprung up behind the waggon as self-elected guardian in the place of Long Jim, unexpectedly deceased.

Book II.

GUY

CHAPTER I.

'Be bolde, be bolde, and everywhere be bolde.'—
FAERIE QUEEN.

'*Lost!*' exclaimed a hunter, who, in headlong pursuit of his prey, barely checked his horse on the edge of a chasm, down which the kangaroo leaped, and was dashed to pieces.

Never had an exciting chase ended more unexpectedly, or in keener disappointment.

All the finest qualities that can be born in, or acquired by the sportsman had been

in this instance displayed—unerring skill in tracking, a Spartan-like endurance of hunger and thirst, unwearied bodily exertion, and an indomitable courage that gave no more thought to the chances of failure, than to the decided probability that he himself might be followed by hostile natives, and cheerfully despatched and cooked as 'game' of a superior kind. But to have lost his party, and guides in singling out this special kangaroo on account of his great size and strength, to have compelled him to take to the open, matching his fleetness with the horse that bore him in pursuit, to have been forced more than once to wheel and retreat, because the usually timid prey had turned fiercely and striven with his great claws to tear open the horse's flank, then, in the very moment of success, to see him disappear into the bowels of the earth, was enough to strike

disgust into the heart of the poorest Nimrod living.

He dismounted from his sweating horse, and walking to the edge of the precipice of which (when his horse and he half hung over it) he had got one appalling glimpse, looked over. Till a few seconds ago, he had imagined himself ascending an elevated ridge of poor forest-land, intermixed with brush, that continued indefinitely; but now, as he looked sheer down three thousand feet of rock, it occurred to him that the kangaroo had only by a hair's breadth escaped complete revenge on his pursuer.

His glance followed the rills of water that ran down those eternal walls, and lost themselves in the thicket of vines and creeping plants that covered the bottom of the valley, then with an effort he lifted his eyes to where in the far distance was

visible a dim line of coast hills, separated from him by innumerable ravines, precipices, and river-swept glens that threatened destruction to any who sought to pass them. Behind him stretched the bush—limitless, and to civilised man, life-denying—around him glared the pitiless heat of a tropical noon, and only yonder, beyond those shoals and quicksands of the Australian forest, showed a chance of that life to which he had surely proved himself tolerably indifferent that day.

'First be sure you are right, then go ahead,' the Americans say, but the sportsman had no such certainty as leading his horse, he followed the edge of the ravine for about a couple of miles, now and again glancing over it to behold the wild magnificence of such a scene as the pencil of Salvator alone could have reproduced; but these picturesque arrangements of Nature

did not particularly delight him, for he was hungry, and seemed not a step nearer food or safety than he had been half-an-hour before. But gradually the steepness of the walls below diminished, and golden wattle and cypresses having obtained a foothold on the sterile rock ran like laughing children to its summit, and hid its naked grandeur, while below a sparkling stream spoke to some not far distant river to which it was hurrying to pay tribute.

He resolved to descend and push on to the waterfall whose thunder sounded faintly in his ears—thence he might scale his way to those upper heights parallel with where he stood, and so gain the coast hills that in the fierce hard glare seemed so much further distant from him than they actually were. He loosed his horse without concern. She was only the companion of a day, and in the bush would find food,

and, perhaps, regain the guides and his friend. So, without looking back, he sprang down the flower-covered precipice, and in a very few moments stood in the valley below. Looking up he saw the horse's head peering after him; it vanished, and a curious feeling of how far he was from human companionship seized him as he pursued his way, the glen narrowing till there was scarcely room for the river and he to walk abreast, and he felt like a man immured in a coffin, of which the sides were flowers, sickening him with their harsh brilliancy and perfume.

How was the adventure to end? In a superb waterfall that would prove a *cul-de-sac*, or in a piece of rock hurled down on him from above by a savage's hand, or to emerge on a hostile encampment to which he would furnish the most delicate dish of the evening's supper, or to starve slowly in

Nature's lap, cursing the gorgeous beauty with which she had decked herself, even while she refused him a chance of life? To have turned back to the bush was to endure death—to descend to the unknown was to court it, but his fears troubled him little as he pushed forward, the thunder of the waterfall growing louder each moment in his ears, and drowning the gurgling notes of the laughing jackass that flitted before him from bough to bough, too contemptuous of his presence to display fear.

He began to think that he was entangled in the waters of some mighty river, as after pursuing the ravine for about three miles, during which it imperceptibly widened, he found that it diverged into half-a-dozen windings, all of which poured their streams into the glen whence he had issued. At haphazard he chose one, and presently emerging from it, found

himself face to face with one of those sublime convulsions of nature that dwarf human beings in their own eyes to their real pigmy stature, and compel man to look upwards, and acknowledge God.

For here the earth appeared riven to its foundations, and as though to hide this cruel rift in the great mother's side, a glorious river that had been gathering in its shining tribute as it passed through an elevated country, now swept itself over the precipice in two liquid sheets of silver that, falling sheer down three hundred feet, met at the base of the riven rock in a sea of foam; then, scarcely pausing to mingle, rushed through the cleft rocks for a few hundred yards till, reappearing, they descended by a succession of smaller falls to the glens, where the perpendicular cliffs frowned over, and hid them from sight.

The sportsman's feeling was one of stu-

pefaction as he gazed, for this gigantic cascade closed his last chance of escaping to the coast, then, looking upwards (for he stood at the point where the river divided to enter the glens), it suddenly struck him that those rocks which seemed almost to meet above his head could be no more than a kangaroo's leap apart, and on the opposite side to where he stood lay the valley he had seen from afar off and beyond which rose the low green line of coast hills that meant safety.

'I'll try it,' he said, aloud, his voice sounding like a whisper in the roar of the waters; then seeing that the naked rock before him was inaccessible to the foot of animal or man, he turned to examine the one at his back, and to his joy found that it was broken here and there by scrub and broom grass, and by which a man might by good luck swing himself to its summit, or if

that luck were evil, slip backwards over a thousand feet, and receive soft sepulture in the rushing foam.

But the Englishman was not to perish so. Foot by foot he fought his way upwards, escaping a hundred deaths by sheer coolness of nerve, and quickness of eye, and, by one final effort, reaching the level ground above, fell prone on it, too exhausted even to rejoice in victory.

He lay so long that a raven, fresh from sharing the mournful silence of a shepherd's hut, alighted close, and uttered in his ear one of those dismal, melancholy cries that are almost human in their misery. A coach-whip took a bath flying through the river just above its fall, and rapped out the full, strong note that ends sharply as with the loud crack of an invisible whip. The familiar sound revived, and the raven enraged the sportsman, he sate up and saw

before him, about four miles away, that coy and beautiful valley that the waterfall and the rugged glen alike had conspired to hide away from the sight of civilised man. He sprang up, and made a step forward as though to behold it more nearly, then saw how the chasm that from below it had seemed possible to leap, now showed a distance from rock to rock that measured by the naked eye could not fall far short of twenty feet.

Not much for a kangaroo, or an athlete in good form, but well-nigh impossible to a jaded man whose muscles were unstrung by fatigue, and who had not tasted food since daybreak.

He sat down to review the situation, but this was more to rest his bones, than to exercise his mind in a choice of his evils. That dogged, ineradicable, cold-blooded pluck that makes the Englishman what he

is, whether fighting in blue waters, or step by step forcing his way against fixed bayonets in battle, unconscious of honour, while from his heart he does his duty, made this man, as a matter of course, decide on doing his level best, and regard with very little concern the possibility of his falling short of it.

The width of a leap may sometimes be measured by the rate of a man's strength, and a paltry brooklet of six feet cost a more heroic effort than the leaping of three times that distance by an athlete, fresh from training, and with every sinew and muscle obedient to his will, but our sportsman had no thought in his heart for defeat as he stepped back, then collecting in one vigorous moment his supremest energies of heart, soul, and body, to o'er-leap his goal, rushed at it like a winged thing, and only when his feet struck the edge of the

abyss, and his hands clutched the dry grass, knew that he had lit upon not death, but safety.

When after a few moments he stood erect, he saw his beautiful valley indeed, but afar off, and between him and it a ridge of lofty, rocky hills, forming deep glens even more difficult of descent than those that had led him to the waterfall. But, being reckless now, he soon found himself in the ravine, and as he pushed forward gradually heard the roar of the waterfall more and more faintly, so that it had entirely ceased when emerging from the narrow mouth of a glen, lo! he beheld the most picturesque scene that his travels round the world had yet shown him.

Behind him like tall prison gates of flowers, closed the rocky range by which he had gained access to the spot—away to the east a stupendous chain of mountains lifted

their blue heads above the horizon, while between him and the low grassy hills that stretched to the west, lay a park such as God might have made at the beginning of years, and over which yet brooded that divine freshness and peace known in primeval lands alone, as though His breath yet hovered about His handiwork, and there had been found none to disperse it.

And if a man once breathe such an air, unconsciously it may become as the life of his soul to him, and he will feel that he stifles, and dies in the narrow daily round of his civilised existence—he will pine for the boundless space, sunshine and freedom, for the clear, pure atmosphere and unimpeded territorial grandeur, that are the savage's heritage and kingdom, and in which he rejoices and distances his white brother, who in all creation discovers the image of himself, not his Maker.

'No wonder Trefusis despised his inheritance,' he exclaimed aloud, and despised it himself as he went forward, following the course of a strong and beautiful stream that wound in and out between the trees, forming large pools into which English grasses and water-weeds might themselves have nodded.

There was not a sign of human life visible. He felt as Adam may have done on his one day alone in Eden as he advanced, then stopped suddenly as mingling with the rushing of the stream there came to his ear the sound as of a young voice singing.

In its sweet descents, its clear rise and fall as it seemed to shoot like a gleam of silver the running waters, it resembled not a little the nightingale's notes, and startled the hearer with a vague sense as of English airs sung by unfamiliar lips. But whose was

the voice? or did some English boy or maid sing in captivity beneath the boughs of one of those trees that here and there overhung the very water's edge?

So this was not Eden, and hidden by yonder vast cluster of trees, a mile or so distant, no doubt a hostile encampment lurked, to whom he might possibly furnish occasion for a feast and an evening's rejoicings. But this possibility did not trouble him as he followed the voice, and felt his pulses stir as he stood on the nether side of a gigantic tree and wondering what he should find on the other side—peeped.

To be sure a boy might wear doublet and hose of green leaves skewered together by wooden pins, and dance to his own reflection in the water, singing clear and sweet, as one the breath of whose soul is liberty—but had ever a boy limbs like these, or the exquisite nape of such a neck

as made the gazer long to turn it, and see the quality of the face on the other side?

The sportsman had often seen a sunbeam dance, but never till now watched a pure human frolic of heart, soul, and body that moved to the music of its own voice, and outmatched the sunbeam in its grace, as it defied it in colour. But what had an aborigine to do with grace or decency, least of all with the snowy linen spread at the water's edge that she had plainly come hither to wash? Female aborigines do not wear clothes as a rule, their entire absence of personal charms rendering any attempt at concealment of their persons a mock modesty to which they scorn to stoop, so that virtue is in a way forced upon them, and gradually accepted as daily bread, and clung to by mere force of habit. But he grew hungry, and he knew that any moment he might be surprised by the men

returning from their hunting, so he advanced boldly, and using the only language he knew that women understand all the world over, took her waist in both hands, and kissed her.

Perhaps Eve, overtaken, received her lord's first caress so—though on this point history is silent—perhaps, too, Adam took his first box on the ear like a man, and while wondering a little at her civilised habits (he being made a trifle before her), only held her the tighter, and kissed her the more; and if Eve had presently relented, and being forced to it, looked at her captor, and gazed and gazed, like any eager, innocent child, who learns the likeness of something as strange as beautiful, and loves even while it gazes — then beneath his eyes falters, and half fears, while a thousand virginal alarms, modesties, and doubts leap to her cheek, and dye

or pale it as they arise. . . . I say if Eve were thus, she lived again in the girl who, by the water's edge, looked upon the first white man that had ever crossed her path.

Adam being a trifle older, and having possibly found time to dream of a different sort of a woman, may have taken things less seriously. Yet surely the lifting of Eve's vividly blue eyes from under their dark lashes gave him a delightful kind of surprise; and if she were brown, and he white, with a respect for his own colour, the shock must have been greater, though her very unlikeness to himself might fascinate, and fix him. But this is mere guess-work, and throws no light on the situation (a few thousand years later) of a man and maiden regarding each other in the guise of a perfectly new and beautiful discovery.

Suddenly she slipped from his hold and

retreated backwards before him, a tantalising shape of youth, freshness, and grace that mocked at, even while it beckoned his pursuit.

Probably a woman is never so entirely mistress of a situation as when she is running away, and her speed is superior to that of her pursuer. She is happy, natural, looks her most exquisite, and while outwardly flouting him, owns secretly to a fear lest he may overtake and punish her. And if she has boxed his ears, studied him as a natural curiosity, and fired his blood all in two minutes, then she may dread his catching her all the more, instead of bursting out laughing in his face, when he swears aloud in good English that he will catch and kiss her soundly yet.

But in the midst of her laughter she stopped abruptly, her face changed, paled,

a look of breathless fear flashed into her blue eyes as she pointed over his shoulder at something behind him, then stood still, making at the same moment a swift gesture to him not to approach her. He glanced back, saw a hunter stepping, spear in hand, from the gloom of the glen into the light of the valley, then sprang forward, and seizing the girl, wound his strong arms about her, and had kissed her pale lips before she was able to cry out, or stir a hair's-breadth.

He had sealed his own fate, and even as she thrust him from her, and for a moment he stood alone, a spear aimed with unerring eye pierced him, and he fell to earth, stunned by the violence of the blow.

The girl stepped aside, outwardly indifferent, though her breast heaved passionately beneath her green zone as the foremost warrior of the hunting party ap-

proached her, his eyes flashing, his whole attitude bespeaking the wrath he felt at finding the white man's foot planted on his domain, the white man's lips offering insult to a woman of his tribe. He spoke some rapid words of protection to her in the native tongue, but she shook her head, and clasping both hands about the arm upon which the muscles stood out like cords of burnished steel, whispered something in his ear that brought a frown to his brow, and made him turn on her a keen look of inquiry, beneath which she blushed, and turned aside.

For a moment he watched her averted features, the wild passions of the savage flitting unchecked across his brow—his herculean proportions, and magnificent symmetry of limb and feature, dwarfing her stature to that of a mere child as she stood beside him, then turned his eyes on the white

man at his feet with a glance of unconquerable loathing, his chest rising and falling in a succession of quick beats that betokened the storm rising in his heart.

About his waist was wound in many folds a thick cord spun from the fur of the opossum, which formed a soft and elastic belt, in which were stuck his hatchet and boomerang, while in his hand he carried his throwing-stick and several spears, each headed differently, to meet the emergencies of the chase or war. His glance and carriage showed that mingled pride and dignity equal to the loftiest signs of birth and breeding in the white race, and a more beautiful pair than these two wild forest creatures made when he turned to gaze at his companion, never stood side by side upon virgin soil.

As their eyes met, the passionate entreaty in hers was less pitiful than the

hopeless look of question that seemed to search her very soul and find no answer there; but as her slender hands closed once more upon his arm and she began to speak, one might have guessed her words by the emotions that played rapidly over his features upon which the lights and shadows reflected as in a clear pool.

Hatred, love, contempt, pity succeeded one another, and last of all an expression that would have done honour to a hero, as he stooped, and lifting the wounded man as though he had been a child, strode away with him towards the yet invisible encampment.

With a gesture of passionate joy, the girl followed him along the water's edge for about half a mile, then struck by a sudden thought born of the Englishman's ghastly pallor, whispered in the man's ear and in the native tongue,—

'It is the *Neilyeri?*'

He made her no reply till they had reached the clusters of miams, whose very smoke was hidden by the density of the trees overhead, but when he came to the boundary-line that divides the bachelors' quarters from the rest, and that no maiden may cross without dishonour, he turned and looked at the signs of passionate fear and hope in her eyes.

'Send hither our mother, Monana,' he said, as one who had not heard her question, and disappeared with his burden into the interior of the miam.

CHAPTER II.

'Oh, Heaven! it is mysterious, it is awful to consider that we not only carry each a future ghost within him, but are in very deed ghosts!'—CARLYLE.

WHEN the Englishman came to his senses it was to find himself alone in the darkness, while on all sides of him echoed an extraordinary blending of sound that, now wailing, now joyous, might have satisfied the most fastidious ear with its faultless time and tune.

In the same moment he was conscious of excruciating pain in the right shoulder, and struggling to rise, fell back more than once before he succeeded in groping his way to

the rude opening to the miam, whence he thrust it aside, only to recoil in horror at the sight before him. Whirling towards him in the clear light of the moon came an army of skeletons leaping high in the air and writhing like serpents, while they filled the air with hissings that drowned the low, sweet monotone of the invisible singers. As he recoiled, so did that advancing host, disappearing into a dark void beyond, untouched by moon-rays, and whence terrible groans, and the sounds of blows seemed to attest that mere bone might possess all the passions of flesh and blood.

Faint with hunger and loss of blood the Englishman strained his eye after those ghastly apparitions, half wondering if this were hell and he about to be summoned to take part in its rites, when suddenly the smouldering flames of a gigantic fire be-

tween him and them leaped up, half disclosing to him shadowy figures seated in a half-circle, and from whom proceeded the weird and haunting melody that had struck upon his ear when awakening.

Gradually his bewildered senses recovered themselves, and he knew that he was an onlooker at one of those *corrobberies* that with the savage alternate with the pleasures and fatigues of the chase, and into which he throws himself with a frenzied enjoyment that for the time transports him from the self-mastery of a responsible human being to the uncontrolled license of a demoniac agent.

Simultaneously with the leaping up of the flames, the dancers advanced, coming to a sudden halt before their leader, with a precision of movement that would have done honour to the finest English regiment. For a moment he surveyed them keenly;

they struck two pieces of wood together, and never did orchestra respond more magnificently to its conductor than did these untutored savages with their sticks, their faultless precision of movement, and the perfection of time kept by both dancers and musicians being absolutely amazing.

These painted figures that glided forth from the pitch blackness into sight then once more faded again into obscurity, at first displayed only graceful movements of the limbs that gradually increased in vigour, till each man warmed to the savage attitude of the corrobborie jump, all springing in the air to an immense height, their feet again touching the ground with the legs astride, so that the muscles of the thighs were set quivering in such a way that the white lines with which they were painted writhed and quivered horribly like bundles of snakes, while the ground trembled beneath the

force with which the savages' feet struck it.

But the Englishman could no longer stand to gaze at those simulated images of death—he felt himself sinking to the ground when two soft arms caught, and guided him back to his rude couch upon which he half fell, and lost consciousness.

Yet when he struggled back to life he could have sworn that a voice had uttered in his ear, 'You will not die. The arrow was not tipped with the Neilyeri,' but as he dragged himself once more to the doorway he knew himself to be alone, and saw giddily beyond how the crowd of skeletons had divided itself into two parties, and with a chorus of deafening yells and savage cries had rushed together in close fight, while the women still beat time on the opossum rugs that they had stripped from their shoulders to use as drums.

Whose voice had uttered that promise of life ?—and those soft arms were a woman's—but the girl he had surprised under the tree that afternoon had not known English, even if she had acquired some English ways. All the same the unknown had brought him good tidings, and regaining his couch, he fell at last into an uneasy slumber that was not broken by the noiseless entry of the man of whom the girl had begged the stranger's life that afternoon.

The savage carried a piece of burning torch that he carefully shaded with his hand, as he approached, and looked upon the sleeper's pale and weary face.

It was a face of the best type of English muscular manhood—a shade undisciplined perhaps, as though the higher faculties had not yet been brought fully into play, but with noble capacities that the savage's keen eye was not slow to perceive.

The usually sunny hair, now dark with the sweat of pain, excited his admiration, the strip of whiteness showing above the bronzed forehead, seemed to puzzle him till he saw that the half-uncovered throat matched it in hue, though the hand that hung listlessly down was almost as brown, though no whit more supple and delicate than his own. The Englishman's superb length of limb and depth of chest were fully shown by his attitude, and keenly noted by the gazer, who yet seemed a more striking and powerful figure, as he stood motionless, and vividly illuminated by the light he held, so that he resembled a burnished statue of copper, into whose eyes the sculptor had contrived to flash and fix those burning passions that scorch the soul.

There was neither cruelty nor hatred in his gaze, but something of the brooding fear with which a mother may regard that

which, though beautiful in itself, is dangerous to what she loves. A sigh broke from his heaving breast; for a moment he hid his eyes on his arm, his whole gesture one of bitter renunciation and despair, then extinguishing the light, was lost in the darkness, nor could the acutest ear have detected the fall of those retreating feet that had power to strike the earth with a sound as of thunder.

CHAPTER III.

For an' I were dead, and ye were dead,
And baith in ae grave had lain, O;
Ere seven years were na at an end,
They'd no ken ye'r dust frae mine, O.

THE morning business of the encampment was in full swing when the Englishman awoke, and through an aperture in the boughs that formed his miam, looked out on the panorama of savage life before him.

At a distance of a few hundred yards the women of the tribe were busily employed in cooking breakfast for their lords, who, fatigued by their exertions overnight, lay about on the burnt grass, now and then exchanging a few words with their fellows,

or tightening the hunger belt made of kangaroo's sinews that each wore about his waist.

To see man and wife together in the attitude to each other that Scripture commends, was a novel sensation to the sportsman, who but recently in town might have pinned labels to the backs of the fair wives of his acquaintances thus: 'Lost, stolen, or strayed, the husbands!'

He was not one of the degenerate race himself, but his companion in the kangaroo expedition to the west was a man who escaped eagerly from the daily placarding of the name with which he had endowed his wife, thereby reducing himself to a cypher not worthy to be strung as a trinket upon her watch-chain. The sportsman wondered where he might be now, and if he had as excellent a prospect of breakfast and flirtation with a brown Venus as might

make a man forget a hard aching pain in his shoulder.? These women seemed to him everything that she was not, as he watched them at their rude baking and cooking, their skins darker than he recollected her's, but perhaps they furnished the prose of the camp to which she was the poem, and did its work while she slept happily and dreamed of *him*. The encampment was a large one, and jealously divided into three groups of miams for married folks, bachelors, and maidens. Strict laws of etiquette prevailed, by which married folks do not quarrel at night, young men do not steal interviews with their sweethearts, or neighbouring tribes venture to make a raid on the camp to seize its fattest woman; but laws are made to be broken, and sometimes a summer night will be made hideous from the occurrence simultaneously of all three accidents before mentioned. But the sports-

man's rest had not been so disturbed; he had found that dry couch of fern the softest couch he had ever lain on—and when he woke, the savoury odours that greeted his nose suggested less his latter end, than his stomach's satisfaction. The smell of roasting flesh and small birds, the less perceptible odours of edible roots and shell-fish cooking in ashes, made him long for the moment when the head of the camp should appear and by his presence permit the meal to commence. For some time impatient glances had been directed by both men and women towards a miam that stood apart from the rest, and was surrounded by a broad ring of emerald coutch grass, that offered a striking contrast to the brown appearance by the surrounding encampment. Significant gestures were made by the women, conveying contempt for the lengthy toilette that kept the whole camp hungry

and waiting, while the men pointed in the direction of the east, where the sun's rays had long ago kindled the grey plains beneath the mountains into green, while the haze of trembling gold that hovered in mid-distance was rapidly hardening into the fierce splendour of an Australian noon.

A crowd of little children, not yet able to walk, had crawled or rolled themselves to the river's edge, into which they soused head-foremost, swimming to and fro like ducks, and happy as in their native element.

Yonder, exempt by reason of her charms from cooking or other duties, sat the belle of the camp, an immensely fat woman, whose doting husband, as he rubbed her back with grease, was not unaware that his proud position exposed him to many dangers, and particularly to the loss of his kidney-fat, for which more than one ad-

jacent chief had long yearned in vain. Indeed her presence was at once the delight and danger of the camp, as almost nightly a raid was made on it to steal her, but being securely guarded, she had hitherto defied all attempts at ravishment, and remained to harrow up the feelings of all lean members of her own, and the opposite sex.

Hard by, a young man held his sick baby, rubbing its gums and calling it a 'poor old fellow,' which is the savage's way of commiserating everything, from the moon suffering eclipse down to his favourite dog. A woman was laughing and running away, holding up her opossum rug to shield herself from the spear that her little boy in a fit of passion was hurling at her with all his force, while beneath the trees an old man was putting a squad of youngsters through a series of war evolutions that they executed with faultless

precision. He could not but be struck with the unstudied ease and grace of these creatures in whom he observed a world of latent force that made them appear to him vital and quick to an extraordinary degree, in comparison with those listless figures that had hitherto come and gone within his outlook.

In all these surroundings he found nothing uncommon: over and over again during his travels in Australia he had seen just such men and women, and had thought of, and treated them as little more than wild beasts; but by what freak of fortune came a Maori man and maid to dwell in their midst, conforming to their customs, living their life, though the girl clung to the dress of the women of her country, and wore green leaves indeed, but with a difference?

The netted cloth made of split leaves of the flax that he had so often seen in New

Zealand had never struck him as beautiful, nor had the women, though often lovely, tempted him, but this girl whom he had found in the heart of a savage tribe puzzled him with a sense of incongruity, and he longed to see her again, and prove his memory of her false or true.

Perhaps she was the wife of the splendid fellow who had speared him, and they had run away together from Maori land, content even among aborigines, so they might dwell together; but no—the girl was no wife, he thought with a curious throb of jealousy; had ever any wife such virginal eyes and lips as she? Yet what did she here save as a chance guest as he himself was a chance prisoner of the tribe for the night?

As the minutes passed, more than one beautifully embroidered back was shrugged angrily, and even the men were growing impatient, when the mat before the miam,

at which all glances were directed, stirred, and in the aperture appeared an elderly Maori woman, tall, erect, bearing herself as one used to command, and stepping with all the inborn dignity of her race.

She wore the netted dress with which he was familiar, and her appearance was the signal for breakfast to commence, and the hungry men fell upon it greedily, with a parson-bird overhead in his black suit and white bands to say grace, and a bald-headed friar (looking out for alms) to nod a feathered Amen.

But our sportsman felt a cold shiver where he had shortly thought to experience most comfort, when the mat that formed his doorway was thrust aside, and entering, she stood for a full minute gazing down upon him, her eyes at once expressing the fascination and hatred with which his presence filled her.

A thousand memories and thoughts flitted through her brain, and across her face as she gazed, seeming to read his very soul, emotions of love and revenge, mercy and fear, succeeding each other so rapidly, that his spirit was roused, and he entered into her mood, recognising in her no common woman, and one who had a message to deliver to which he was bound to hearken.

It was no surprise to him that when at last she spoke, it was in English, and so perfectly that he knew she must have lived long among the whites to have so mastered their tongue.

'You are wounded,' she said, 'and by the laws of the tribe you will be neither killed nor starved—but when you are whole, they will give you a chance of escape, though he must be a fleet runner who will outstrip the boomerangs that will follow him. But one word from me

would stretch you dead on the couch where you now lie, for to these people I am a wise-woman, and powerful as in my own country is the *Tohunga* of my tribe.'

'Then, for God's sake, use your influence to get me some breakfast,' said the Englishman, in whom a tolerably long acquaintance with Maories and aborigines had bred but little respect or fear for either race, 'and this wound hurts confoundedly, and wants dressing.'

'You jest,' cried Monana, fiercely; 'it is easy to you to break our hearts and smile; but if you are not headstrong, you will give me the promise I have come to seek, and when your wound is healed, you will go your way, leaving me and mine in peace.'

'And this promise?' said the Englishman.

'That you will not leave this hut, or try and obtain speech with the maiden you insulted yesterday—for girls are willing,' added Monana, bitterly; 'and I would rather kill her with my own hand than see her fulfil her mother's fate.'

'And yours?' said the Englishman, looking at the woman keenly.

'Mine?' cried Monana, tossing her arms above her head with a gesture that expressed the hidden agony of a long lifetime; 'but what is that to you? You make toys of us, you cast us out from our people; for the woman who has once loved a white man never turns back to her own tribe, she must wander,—wander always, when deserted, always among strange people.'

'So that is why you are here?' said the Englishman; 'you are only sojourning among these people?'

'I go hither and thither,' said the woman, bitterly; 'by fear I rule, and by the arts I teach, so that Djarrah, son of my son, and Yuntha, daughter of my daughter, are welcome wheresoever they may go.'

'They are married?' said the Englishman, quietly.

The Maori looked at him long and keenly, then said, 'If they are not married they are *tapu'd* to one another by the laws of their race—he might claim her as his wife to-morrow, but he is honourable—he would have love as well as duty.'

'Love is for people who have breakfasted,' said the Englishman, and pointed to a warrior who was playfully spearing his spouse in the leg in punishment of some trifling misdemeanour towards himself.

'And you swear not to seek speech with the maiden?' cried Monana, swiftly.

'After breakfast, perhaps,' he said, looking hungrily through the boughs, but descrying no food approaching from either earthly or heavenly ravens.

'Then it will be too late,' said Monana, resolutely; 'for rather than see her die as her mother did, suffer as I have done, I will kill you myself, for you white men are more cunning than the water-moles; and long before your wound is healed, you will have stolen speech with her, and to kill you then would be too late. You shall die now;' and with the swiftness of lightning had thrown herself upon the wounded man, and was in the act of plunging a poisoned dart into his breast, when Djarrah, entering, wrested it from her hand, and with a gesture of shame and anger thrust her from the miam.

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders, and checked the impulse that would have extended his hand in gratitude to Djarrah, who now stooped, and removing the bandages from his shoulder, carefully examined his wound, showing signs of satisfaction as he did so.

Then he disappeared, returning immediately with dressed meat, fish, and a kind of bread, all neatly served in baskets made of green leaves, and upon which the Englishman fell as one famished with those natural knives and forks that in moments of emergency remind us of our primitive origin.

Djarrah then removed the platters, brought fresh water, and placed a cooling drink beside the couch of fern, performing all these duties with a dignity and grace that commanded the captive's admiration and esteem.

Impatient glances had long been cast towards the hut by a band of hunters who, beneath the trees, waited only for Djarrah, to start upon one of those expeditions upon whose success depended the evening's meal.

When at last he turned to go, he looked at the Englishman—their eyes met, but if a sensation of shame stirred in either heart it was not in the savage's, nor did any ignoble sign of revenge or hatred cross his lofty lineaments as he regarded the man, who, though so completely in his power, defied him.

But even when he issued from the miam, pausing on its threshold to look back at the white man with a curious mingling of protection, pity, and anxiety in his glance, the members were doomed to further delay, for hastily beckoning half-a-dozen of the older men of the camp,

Djarrah rapidly addressed them, his gestures so illustrating his words that every syllable he uttered was intelligible to the Englishman.

He accused Monana, wise-woman and deeply dreaded by the tribe, of treachery —he pointed as to a wound that his own hand had inflicted, and made gestures of healing; pointed to the distance as one who sees his game escaping, then dashes forward in pursuit — lastly selected the oldest and strongest of the chiefs, and placing the Englishman under his guardianship and protection, moved swiftly away.

His words had been received first with dissatisfaction, then respect, lastly with obedience; and Monana gnashed her teeth as the old man selected for the Englishman's special body-guard took up his position just outside the tent, and sat down evidently determined not to be dislodged by

anything less than an earthquake. Meanwhile Djarrah approached the miam, whose fairy ring of green should properly have enclosed the beautiful brown witch who had ravished the white man's eyes yesterday, instead of the hideous hag who had issued from it half an hour ago. Where was the girl now, he wondered, and what was she doing? Weaving a bodice of fresh leaves, with a thought for him between, or peeping through her wurley boughs at the magnificent black lover whom her fancy had only for one brief moment of surprise deserted?

Black! So he contemptuously designated the skin that was but a few shades darker than his own, through whose brown clearness the blood leaped, and the soul shone eloquent and beautiful. And were ever English lips touched with so rich a red as those he had yesterday seen quiver

to each thought as easily as her body swayed like a leaf to the ruffling breeze. She would marry this fellow, of course, and some day he would perhaps insist on rubbing those beautiful limbs with grease, and her blue eyes would fade, and in time she would become a sort of furniture-horse, upon which her husband would hang all his superfluous belongings when travelling.

Apparently some one was sulky, for Djarrah stood some moments outside that ring of coutch grass before the expression of his features showed that he was answered from within.

The whole business of the camp waited on, or was suspended by, this audience. The women smiled, and the men groaned, as at a prospect of further delay, when the entrance to the hut was thrown aside, and Yuntha appeared in the aperture.

Can any one fix the precise moment

when the magic fades out of a sunset sky, or a glow of liquid light on a corn-field is withdrawn, and only the cold, formal grain faces us instead of a flood of glory? It was with something of this sense of disillusionment that the Englishman gazed at the girl, feeling as though some subtle change had passed over and darkened her during the night, bringing her by many degrees nearer to the other women of her race than in his fancy of her he had dreamed possible.

She wore the apron of emu's feathers, the badge of maidenhood, that she had yesterday discarded as she danced by the water's edge; her limbs were as exquisite, her expression as entrancing as ever, yet the Englishman felt a pang of disappointment keener than his hunger had been as he gazed at her, and realised that the clear morning light might hide charms that the evening had falsely striven to exaggerate.

She had a troubled expression as she looked down, and seemed weary as one who has fasted, but as she spoke, the colour grew in her cheek, and soon the Englishman met the glance, spent to all appearance in the wurley-boughs of a pair of blue eyes, whose wistful longing seemed to hint that her looks might be even sweeter in advance than in retreat.

'He is placing her upon her honour,' said the Englishman aloud; 'but I've promised nothing, and we shall see.'

He wondered if the pair would kiss at parting—but no, there were four feet of grass between them that Djarrah dared not overstep, and that she had no mind to cross—yet a look of affection, that might have passed for love, overspread her features as he turned to go, so that it was with elastic step, and happy air that

he left the encampment and joined his impatient party, casting one backward look at the miam that had already closed upon the figure of the girl he loved.

CHAPTER IV.

The lady stands in her bower door,
And thus she made her maen,
Oh! shall I gang to the Broomfield Hill,
Or shall I stay at hame?

A FEW of the younger women looked after the hunters as they crossed the river, their faces toward the sun, their figures turned to bronze in the strong light that made the water a bath of molten silver through which they stepped with as free and unimpeded steps as on dry land. A swarm of little children accompanied them to the opposite bank, then came tumbling back to their mothers, with whom the

home business of the camp was now actively commencing.

Many of the women took their bags and departed to search for yams in the forest, or to fish in the lagoons, others to gather wood and sticks, while some of the old men, exempt from the fatigue and anxieties of the chase, collected the young boys, and resumed those warlike exercises that had been interrupted by breakfast.

Half-a-dozen of the young girls gathered together in a cluster, and conversed in whispers, glancing alternately at the distant miam containing the Englishman, and at the larger one which contained the young girl who had just furnished him with so keen a disappointment.

Their gestures expressed curiosity, some pity, and a little sly derision as they glanced at the guard placed before his door, and then shook their heads, for

they had been too often beaten by their parents for contriving stolen interviews with their lovers not to know when such meetings were within the reach of possibility, and when beyond it. A matron, whose scarred head bore at least fifty witnesses to her husband's affection, cast a kindly look at the chattering girls as she hurried on her way to gather tribute for her master, while the fat woman of the tribe sunned herself in her open doorway, and in confidence awaited the fruits of her adoring spouse's labour.

As happy as she, the old man set as the Englishman's watch squatted on the burnt grass, and looked out at the beauty of rock and valley, stream and forest, that represented to him the satisfying of his every want, whether of soul or body.

For him the woods teemed with game, the fish leaped, and the sun shone; for him

were those nights of dreamless slumber, those pearly mornings and ante-twilight hues of deep purple-blue and rose that nightly flushed all the eastern sky; for him those honours of age commanded by the wrinkles that gave his features the serene calm of a graven image; for him awaited that magnificent sepulture in the recesses of the forest when the very trees should silently speak by hieroglyphics to his virtues and heroic feats during life, and rocked by the lullaby of the wind, he would sleep sound and sweet with that noble army to guard him.

The shrill voices of the women passed him by—the children playing about his feet did not for a moment distract his outward gaze; perchance in his eighty years of life he had learned how infinitely more beautiful was the heart of nature than that of man, and in his own had been kindled

that light of peace which may not dwell on the troubled waters of human passions, hopes, and struggles.

A little laughing brown imp, who had been frolicking round the girls, made a sudden snatch at his sister's work-bag, and, racing with it to the Englishman's hut, tossed it over the old man's head into the interior of the miam, then ran away screaming with delight, and pursued by the girl, who was red with anger and shame at this revelation of the secrets of her toilette.

The Englishman opened it eagerly, hoping it might contain some message or sign from Yuntha, but found only paint and feathers, necklaces of teeth and nets for the hair, with thread for cloaks made of the sinews of the opossum's tail, and, lastly, a shrivelled-up slender human hand, memento of some lover who had fallen in

warfare or been compelled to suffer death because he had accidentally taken life. Had Yuntha such a bag and such a memory? She had worn no visible paint that morning or yesterday, but could a summer's night have darkened her as many degrees as though she had been exposed for days to a tropical sun?

Yesterday she had showed to him like an exquisite English maid, whom some wicked sprite, in a fit of rage at her beauty, had coloured brown, nor yet been able to dim one single charm in the process.

To-day—well, to-day—she was a lovely savage, partly sunk to the level of her surroundings, a possible wife to Djarrah, and actual granddaughter to the old woman, who had once, perhaps, been beautiful as herself.

He had thought that he would leave her

in peace. She was none the worse for that 'one kiss of his merrie mouth,' though his shoulder would hold the smart of it for many a long day, and there were lives at home that depended on him for happiness, and should have made Monana's appeal to him unnecessary. And yet this girl had not roused all the sportsman's keenest instincts in him for nothing.

If she had not so narrowly out-distanced him in speed—if she had not boxed his ears, perhaps, or laughed aloud at his English—finally, if she had not ventured into the very arms that were too weak to detain her, he might have forgone his chase; but, as it was—well, he would sleep upon the matter, and decide when he woke up.

His perfect silence presently attracted the attention of his guard, to whose keen ear the footfall of the lightest-winged thing was audible; he lifted the mat and looked

within, then with a gesture that represented sleep, and was understood by a distant pair of blue eyes, resumed his seat, and tranquilly gazed at the landscape. So he could go sound asleep at mid-day, not even taking the trouble to watch for her, thought a proud young maiden, who had troubled herself to some purpose about the white man during the last dozen hours or so, even to lengthening her green hose a good two inches, and drawing her bodice up the same goodly height above her lovely bosom. For the rest, her grandmother had cared for her toilette, but this she had forgotten, when, hearing Djarrah's voice without, and forgetting her promise not to show herself, she had gone to the door to gather news of the Englishman.

He might have seen her—perhaps he did—and now, instead of watching for her to reappear, he could go sound asleep.

Perhaps he snored—why not? Strange sounds were sometimes wafted from the bachelors' to the virgins' quarter of the encampment, and Monana herself could snore through her nose like any trooper.

As she stood with the half-twined hunger-belt in her hand, and looking through the boughs, her grandmother entered, and, in the aborigine tongue, asked what she stared at out yonder?

Yuntha's colour rose and sank: she dared not tell what was in her heart to the imperious woman who had ruled her own and Djarrah's lives from the very birth, but she asked permission to go to the river for a breath of fresh air, promising to return quickly.

'He is asleep,' muttered Monana to herself, 'and, moreover, is well guarded; and the water-moles can do her no harm, or teach her his accursed tongue. Go,' she

added aloud, 'but, remember, the first attempt you make to see the white man seals your fate—you shall die, either by my own hand, or by the tribe under whose protection we dwell.'

Yuntha's eyes flashed, and the blood sprang to her cheek.

'Need you tell me that, mother?' she said in the native tongue; 'have I not long ago chosen your people for mine, and even stooped to deceit to dwell with you? I have made my choice—I am a brown woman, and will live and die one.'

Monana looked at the girl long and fixedly, then said, 'And Djarrah?'

'We are cousins—we are wanderers in a strange country, and we love one another,' said Yuntha, steadily; 'but since he will not compel me to go to him, neither can you.'

'He is a fool,' cried Monana, passionately, and thrust the girl aside. 'Go—go to your water-moles, but do not dream of the man with the white skin and the black heart, for one sign of favour from you shall be his doom.'

'A Maori woman does not seek lovers,' said Yuntha, proudly, 'and if they follow, she knows how to fly without being overtaken,' and even as she spoke, disappeared like a flash of green light across the encampment, and along the water's edge.

Left alone, Monana took up a position exactly outside the miam, and within full view of the Englishman's prison, so that none could enter or leave it, without her knowledge. So watching, and with eyes turned inward upon a dark page of human nature, she formed an ignoble pendent to the old man whose serene gaze grew more and more beautiful as he pondered upon

that open book of Nature that he knew and loved so well. Perhaps the Maori woman despised the aborigine, and who might venture to judge between them? Only year by year into the heart of the one stole peace, and into the other war.

CHAPTER V.

Ye couldna see her lillie feet,
Binnorie, O Binnorie;
Her gouden fringes were sae deep,
By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie.

ONCE out of sight of the encampment Yuntha went more slowly, then paused to stamp her foot on the grass, then clenched her slender hands and looking down at her brown limbs, blushed vividly with the first sensation of shame at her half-nakedness that she had ever known.

'He treated me like a savage,' she thought, and then could have cried for anger, knowing that she was one. Till to-day she had been proud of her birthright

of unfettered freedom, and would not have exchanged it for that narrow civilised life of which she had heard, and unfeignedly pitied the men and women forced to conform to it.

To be clothed all over except the tips of your nose and fingers, to go to bed at morning, and wake at night, to eat when you are not hungry, to drink fire-water, and not honour your parents, to live in stifling dwellings that cannot be moved according to the season of the year, now to the river, now to the forest, and again to the sea-coast, with the ever-shifting variety of food and landscape, without which the true-born savage would pine away and die—how could a man do all these things, yet save himself from looking stolid, and contemptible, and ridiculous, the very opposite in short of the man she had seen yesterday? To be sure he was

clothed—yet such clothing had not struck her as disgraceful or unbecoming, and he was able to use his limbs, to run almost as swiftly as herself—he had even accomplished a feat that Djarrah never had—for he had kissed her.

She put both hands before her face, and sat down suddenly by the river side, missing by merest accident the tail of a death-adder, who made no distinctions between beauty and ugliness, and would have resented the weight of her charms as promptly as if she had been Monana.

The yellow flowers of the acacia drooped over and almost hid her shape—but a slight paddling sound that quickly approached made her look up to see her pets bending the green spikes of the arrow-grass beneath their mandibles, and thrusting out of sight those Australian water-lilies that often remind the settler of home.

Soon there scrambled up the bank, and almost into the girl's lap one of those shy and delicate creatures that for years baffled the comprehension of all scientific men and naturalists, and on acquaintance turned out to be the most gamesome, loving of playfellows, whose antics would mend a sore heart or make a misanthrope laugh against his will.

Its small brilliant eye sought hers with almost a human look of sympathy, its ears expanded and contracted as though eager to catch her lightest whisper, while its heart palpitated violently as though in fear of a repulse.

Its rosy beak, and smooth clean fur as it leaned to the young girl did her no discredit, but soon noticing her abstraction, it stretched out its forepaws and opening its bill—yawned profoundly.

To see a duck yawn is apt to tickle one

with laughter, and Yuntha was not insensible to the comedy of this interruption to her thoughts, though when she roused herself to turn to her pet, it was only to see him inclining his body to one side and scratching himself in the politest manner imaginable. She burst out laughing, and did not start when a harsher echo reached her, and there stepped from behind an adjacent gum-tree a man, whom she received with a smile and a look of welcome, that reflected itself on his features as he sat down beside her, the water-mole and he making an odd pair of admirers that there was nobody save the girl, and the river to smile at. The water-mole looked natural, the man incongruous and out of harmony with his surroundings. True he was as respectably naked, as rigidly innocent of soap and water as the best-bred aborigine,

his hair had the regulation crisp curl, and his long sinewy hands spoke to the manner of his existence, but, on the other hand, he had calves to his legs, his shoulders were square and broad, and instead of the dark brilliant eye of the savage, a small grey one looked out from the surrounding brown of his countenance, with an amount of speculation in it by no means common to the tribe to which he was supposed to belong.

'Billy,' exclaimed the girl almost before he had seated himself, 'what do you think? I've seen a man!'

'Have you, indeed?' said the new comer, looking cautiously round to see if any birds of the air were listening. 'But speak lower, my dear, for I'm dumb, and you don't know a word of English.'

'Do all white men try to kiss white

girls the first time they see them?' said Yuntha, turning her head aside, and stroking the rich fur of her pet.

'That depends on the woman,' said Billy, looking keenly at her half-averted face; 'if she were forward like——'

'But I went backwards,' cried the girl, looking round. 'I led him nearly a mile before——'

'Too much backwardness is sometimes as provocating as too much invitation,' said Billy, in a voice of rebuke; 'and for a young maid like you, kissing is not the becomingest occupation in the world.'

'Does kissing mean love?' she said, looking earnestly at Billy.

'No—play.'

'Then English maids must always be playing,' said the girl, 'for he did it quite naturally, just as if he were used to it.'

'P'r'aps 'twas your colour beguiled him,'

said Billy, looking at her in a puzzled way; 'blessed if you don't look browner than ever to-day.'

The girl blushed—she had her womanish secrets even from him—then said,

'Isn't it beautiful to be brown, Billy?'

'It's the only right, the proper colour,' said Billy, gravely; 'and there's no denying that you're a most delicious spectacle, ... and did he frighten you very much, my dear?' he added, looking at the girl with a great air of innocence.

'His colour did not give me such a dreadful shock as I expected,' she said, turning her head aside; 'and his blood is as red as ours. I saw it spilt at my feet—and he is beautiful. But oh, Billy! why do you hate the white people so? Were they unkind to you when you lived among them?'

'Hush!' he said, looking round anxi-

ously. 'We've kept our secret a good many years now, my dear—it must be nigh upon fourteen, perhaps, since I found you playing here with the water-moles, and you the tricksiest of them all.'

'And when grandmother came and found me asleep in your arms you put your finger on your lips and pretended to be dumb,' said the girl, laughing. 'But oh, Billy! what a lot we have talked since then!'

'And I've taught you the language,' said Billy, proudly. 'You only knew a broken word or two when I took you in hand, and now you're as elegant as if you'd been to a young ladies' seminary.'

'What's that?' said Yuntha, adding in the same breath, and with a little anxiety in her voice, 'Billy, would you be angry if you knew I'd kept a secret from you for a long time?'

'Is it a matter of sweethearting, my

dear?' he said, turning quickly to look at her, and thinking that no white woman could ever be as beautiful as a brown one.

'No,' said the girl, and blushed. 'There is only Djarrah;—but you didn't teach me English, Billy—not quite all—for grandmother knows it!'

'And she knows that I know it?' said Billy, recoiling, and putting up his hand to his scalp as though he already felt it loose.

Yuntha burst out laughing, and at the sound of her voice the water-moles, repulsed by her neglect, once more approached, but her mind was too full of other matters, and they frolicked off again like two young puppies in their native element.

'Billy,' she said, slyly, 'why do you never take a bath?'

'I daren't wash myself, my dear, they'd suspect me if I did; and that dye does wear off so confoundedly,' he added, inaudibly, but as the girl's blue eyes met his he could have sworn that she had heard him. 'And Monana?' he said, anxiously, not sure of his scalp yet.

'She talks English in her sleep, and she mutters it when awake,' said the girl, 'and between the two she's told me almost everything you wouldn't.'

Billy sat like one transfixed, then plucking up heart of grace said, 'And now that you know all about it, which would you have liked to be, my dear, brown or white?'

'If you had asked me yesterday morning,' said Yuntha, turning her head so that he could not see her face, 'I would have scorned to be different to Djarrah and his people; but to-day,' and here the colour leaped to her cheek, 'I would not be

ashamed to stand up, and own myself a white woman.'

'As a sort of match to the man you've seen to-day,' said Billy, meditatively, 'and so he's beautiful, and I never saw but one man *that* in all my days. Has he got yellow hair?' he added, with a sudden keen suspicion, 'and is he old enough to be—to be your father, my dear?'

'His hair is as yellow as those flowers,' and she lifted her dusky head toward the blossoms overhead; 'but do English fathers value their lives at less than a kiss, Billy, even if they *do* marry when they are ten years old?'

'And so it was a kiss that spilt his blood at your feet,' said Billy, drily; 'and were you willing, my dear, and how did it all happen?'

'I was dancing,' she said, 'and looking in my glass'—she pointed to the river—

'when somebody seized me—but he didn't more than half kiss me then!'

'And what did you do?' said Billy.

'Boxed his ears.'

'He must have thought you uncommon civilised for an aborigine,' said Billy; 'and naturally he kissed you again, or I supposed he tried?'

'Of course, he tried,' said Yuntha; 'but as I told you, I ran away—backwards!'

'And what did he do?'

'Ran after me, to be sure!'

'And you let him catch you,' said Billy, in a tone of disgust, 'a young slipper thing like you, with none of them darned stays and boots and heathenish contrivances for robbing a maid of her wind.'

'He didn't catch me—I stopped,' the girl said, and sighed; 'but oh, Billy! I never knew before how delightful a thing was running away!'

Billy looked suspiciously at her, and shook his head. 'P'r'aps you liked being caught better?' he suggested. But her face had changed, and the tears were in her eyes as she pressed her hand to her green boddice and said, 'It was a wicked bit of fun, Billy, for it nearly cost him his life.'

'Got potted from behind a blue gum, I s'pose,' said Billy, airily; 'a little accident that commonly happens to whites visiting these parts. And is he dead, my dear?'

'No,' she said, in a tone of such indignation that Billy stared at her, 'he is only—only sound asleep.'

'So you'd like him to be awake, and dancing after you?' said Billy, drily.

'He is closely guarded in his miam,' said Yuntha, proudly; 'but don't you think, Billy,' she added, coaxingly, 'don't you

think he might have stayed awake on the chance of getting a peep at me?'

'You're falling in love with him, my dear,' remarked Billy, placidly, 'and that's a mistake.'

'Don't white men ever fall in love with brown women?' said Yuntha — a mischievous smile arching her exquisite mouth.

'They love and ride away,' said Billy, sententiously; and it was curious how in his long service with white people he seemed to have picked up not only their phrases but their songs, so that in Yuntha's opinion he was a very well-read person indeed.

'And they never come back?' said the girl.

'Not unless they're fetched—and a lover that's called for like a parcel, mostly turns out a very poor article, and not worth the booking-fee,' said Billy, with decision.

'Do you think I should ever call for a lover like that, Billy?' she said, with a proud young glance that rebutted the elderly man's experience, and then she laughed and added, 'Supposing there's nobody to fetch?'

'If you'd been white,' said Billy, slowly, 'and you'd been set up in civilised parts, there's lovers that 'ud have come from every part of the world to fetch *you*, and that popinjay who kissed you yesterday 'ud never dare to insult you so. But being brown ——'

'He did not despise me,' said the girl, hanging her head, 'and it is not a disgrace to be brown. . . . all my life I have been taught that white people are monsters, and that white blood was something to be ashamed of, so until to-day the browner I was, the more pride I took in myself; but now I know that you have lied

to me, Billy, and that it is the whites who are masters, and we who are the slaves!'

Billy looked like a detected thief and said nothing.

'Could ever a Maori have faced more perils to reach the valley?' cried the girl, warmly; 'or be braver and — and more audacious' (here she blushed) 'in following a girl into the very jaws of a hostile camp? And perhaps it was very rude of him, Billy' (here she blushed the more); 'but would any black man, even Djarrah, be ready to throw his life away just for one little kiss?'

'I'm ashamed of you, miss,' said Billy, regarding her with great severity, 'it's disgraceful enough for a young maid's lips to be assaulted without her taking a pride in such an unbecoming situation!'

'I like a man who won't be beaten,'

cried the girl, with a flash in her blue eyes that startled Billy into recollection of a pair that he hated. 'If he had run for his life when he saw the spear in Djarrah's hand, I should have despised him with all my soul!'

'And when do they mean to kill him?' said Billy, placidly.

'Kill him!' she faltered. 'Djarrah will not let them do that. He is under Djarrah's protection, and even Monana dares not harm him!'

'*Djarrah!*' said Billy, doubtfully; 'his word will not have half the weight of Monana's. She's only got to hold up her finger, and the tribe would do her bidding. To them she's a witch, a wise woman, while Djarrah's only a young warrior, whom half the men of the tribe are jealous of, since all the women are in love with him.'

'Are they?' said Yuntha, looking out

wistfully at the water. 'I wish he would marry one of them, or that Monana would take us home to our own people. Why are we here, Billy, pensioners on the bounty of strangers, and only tolerated because Monana teaches them our Maori arts, and inspires them with fear?'

'She's got her reasons, no doubt,' said Billy, gravely, 'though I don't know 'em—I reckon mother's love 's mostly at the bottom of it—and she wanted to keep you out of the way of the white men. And p'r'aps she's right,' he added, looking at the girl anxiously, 'you'd just suffocate in the life those folks live, and over there you'd be nobody.'

'And what are we here?' cried Yuntha, swiftly; 'what is the disgrace that forbids our going back to Maori-land, that makes you and my grandmother labour to set me against the white race? There is more

than one secret between us, Billy,' she added, with a faint blush; 'it has been deceit all round with us, and only Djarrah is perfectly true—he knows no tongue save that of the aborigines, he is content to be an outcast, and live the life of strangers.'

'For your sake,' said Billy, drily, 'and haven't you been content too up to yesterday?'

'Yes,' she said slowly, 'I was happy,—it was the life to which I was bred and born, but to-day, Billy, to-day. . . .'

She turned swiftly and put her slender hand on his arm.

'Billy,' she cried, 'did you know it all along—what I was ashamed to tell you—that I thought such a disgrace till yesterday—that my father was white?'

'I've heard whispers of it,' said Billy; 'but the disgrace was not of your own mak-

ing, my dear, and to be sure nobody 'ud ever think of visiting it upon you !'

'It is no disgrace,' she cried, indignantly, then blushed, and looked down at her beautiful bare limbs, 'but he would not have dared to try and kiss me if I had been white; would he, Billy ?' said the girl in an ashamed voice, and with her head turned away.

'Women are women,' said Billy, judicially, 'and whether white, brown, or black, what they want they'll mostly get—even to such a trifle as a kiss.'

'Is it a trifle ?' said Yuntha, not looking round.

'Kiss and bliss,' said Billy, meditatively, 'that's how those darned poets make things rhyme—but in real life things sorts themselves out differently, and something more than kissing's wanted to furnish out a house and trimmings.'

'A house?' said Yuntha, gazing at the river, 'that means four walls, and no air or sun—a place to stifle and die in—no one would wish love to furnish that!'

'There's men,' said Billy, deliberately, 'that sell their souls, consciences, bodies, their very lives, to call themselves owners of four walls, and go through life without a bit of pleasure, without even having time to look at the stars, because they've sold themselves to keep up appearances.'

'What are appearances?' said Yuntha.

'Shadows of everything in life that's worth having,' said Billy, with vigour; 'and that's why I've always thought, my dear, that this was the best sort of life for you after all, and how you'd sicken and pine away if ever you were taken out of your green forests, and your free ways.'

'Then why did you teach me English?' she said, lifting two clear young eyes before

which Billy squirmed, and felt himself in a hole. To be sure the fact of an Englishman penetrating to this remote and isolated spot was a huge misfortune, but there was no reason why the deluge should follow it; and in Billy's opinion the time for revealing himself was by no means ripe, though if second-sight could have set before him the subsequent events of the day, he might have spoken out, and so averted some misery and some joy.

'Why did I teach you English, my dear?' he said at last, 'because it seemed natural like to speak to you that way,'—here he stumbled and faltered, while Yuntha's eyes seemed to look at him like clear pools in which something gradually stirred, and that he knew to be the awakening of memory.

'I know now,' she said, slowly; 'it has puzzled me ever since I saw *him* yester-

day—and by degrees I have *remembered*, though Monana always told me I dreamed. I have seen white men before, and they were kind to me, when I was only a little child!'

'And were they kind to you, my dear?' said Billy, with a suspicious tremble in his voice; 'and to be sure they *loved* you, and 'll watch over you as long as there's breath in their bodies.'

'Watch over me!' repeated Yuntha, incredulously; 'no, no, Billy, it is you and I who have to watch over *them!* And we must contrive his escape—it will not be so difficult to manage if we lay our heads together.'

'Supposing he has run away already?' said Billy.

Yuntha's colour sank, this idea had never occurred to her, and the thought of the wounded man staggering out of his hut and pursued by the deadly boomerangs,

made her start up, eager to return to the Camp to see if such disaster had befallen.

'But Djarrah gave him in charge of the old chief,' she said, eagerly, as she turned to go, 'and Monana would not harm him!' she added, ignorant of the morning's scene.

'No,' said Billy, slowly; 'but if she thought you'd been a bit struck by his colour, she might polish him off quick—and Djarrah might talk till he was blue, but nobody 'ud listen. She's got all the tricks of them darned *Tohungas* and can make a voice come out of Heaven and whistle as she pleases—and if she whistles it down that he is to die, why die he will; for there's no pigs here, as in New Zealand, to divert attention from man as a handsome joint.'

'But these people do not eat the white man,' said Yuntha, indignantly; 'that is one reason why I love them—they are poor,

despised, treated as wild beasts by the Englishmen, but they live better lives on the whole than do we in Maori-land, and if we are more civilized, *they* are more human.'

'And are you fretting after your own country?' said Billy, curiously; 'but, lord, you've never seen it, and how can you think about what you don't remember?'

'I have been thinking of it to-day,' she said sadly, 'and of all Djarrah has taught me—his father was but a boy when grandmother brought him away, but she had taught him all the traditions of our race, and though Djarrah makes no complaint, though he dresses, lives like the aborigines here, I think that in his heart he is always longing to return to his tribe and country.'

'And would you go with him, my dear?' said Billy, looking at her earnestly.

'Yes,' she said firmly, 'we are only three,

and we will stand and fall together. But Monana will not go, and we shall probably live and die here. And they have been kind to us,' she added gently, 'and perhaps it is my fault that I could not try to make friends with the women; they think me vain, and they do not like my dress.'

'To be sure there's something very spicy about it,' said Billy, with a judicial air. 'Many and many a she New Zealander I've seen in them netted things made of flax-leaves, but somehow they didn't sit to their shapes as yours do—and you make 'em fresh every day—which is all the difference.'

'I think I'll wear an opossum rug, Billy,' she said anxiously; 'only it is so hot, and I could not breathe in it; and it is spring-time, and one longs for something cool. But they will never love me here. They hate my blue eyes.'

'How do you know they are blue?' said Billy, crossly.

She pointed to the river.

'There's my looking-glass,' she said.

'And to be sure it's your misfortune, not your fault, that a bit of the sky's got into your eyes,' said Billy; 'but there, if Djarrah don't mind, who else is there to grumble?'

'There are other men in the world besides Djarrah,' she said proudly, then turned to see the Englishman standing motionless, as in the attitude of listening, behind her.

CHAPTER VI.

For when ye gang to the Broomfield Hill,
Ye'll find your love asleep,
With a silver belt around his head
And a broom cow at his feet.

THE purity of Yuntha's complexion was quite restored in the Englishman's eyes when he awoke.

He had dreamed of her, and she had mocked him, and fired his blood anew as she led him a chase that ended in his seizing her only to find that she had changed into another woman who had never run away from him, or possibly any other man in her life.

He woke determined to reverse the dis-

appointment of his dream, and on looking through the boughs discovered a state of things that seemed to lend itself favourably to his resolve, for the whole encampment appeared to be absent or asleep; and while Monana nodded outside her miam, the old man set as watch over him was sitting bolt upright in a slumber that must have been happy, to judge by the serene smile that illumined his features.

The Englishman did not waste much time in hesitation, but with his coat hanging from one shoulder lifted the mat that formed his doorway, and stepped boldly out.

For a moment the glare blinded him after the cool shadow of his miam, then bare-headed he crossed to where Monana sat, and without stopping to see whether she only simulated sleep, or really slept, he thrust aside the curtain and looked in.

It was empty—that ring of emerald coutch-grass, that janitor without had fooled him as to her retreat, and no doubt she was laughing at him from the shelter of one of the women's huts, or trysting with Djarrah at some point equidistant from the hunters and the camp. But this green chamber was hers, and his fastidious eye, while embracing its details at a glance, acknowledged that no English maiden could have rivalled it in purity and refinement, and made him the keener in his search for her, though as to what direction that search should take he was uncertain.

Monana had stirred and muttered as he brushed against her, but slept on, and save the old man no living soul was within the Englishman's ken as he turned to the river—cool, sparkling, lovely—and thought that a header into it offered more

charm even than the pursuit of a brown coquette.

Here, too, was his chance of escape—perhaps mercifully placed in his way by Djarrah, and winked at by Monana, who only desired his disappearance from the scene. But in this he was only partly right, for while the old aborigine only simulated sleep, and wished the Englishman to get away, Monana, secure in his guardianship of the foe, enjoyed in dreams the vengeance she was secretly preparing to wreak upon the young man's head, and was happy.

The stranger's keen eye swept the women's quarter in vain—each miam was mute, eyeless, without sign or sound of any living thing within, and to search them would be folly when moments were golden, and at any moment a spear in his back might pay his debt to nature without

any reference to his own personal feelings.

Nevertheless there was no particular hurry, he thought, as he turned his face to the river, and stood for a minute beneath the shade of a tree; he would stroll a little way, and, if pursued, take to the water, and make up his mind there as to what he wanted.

Soon he forgot himself and the smart of his shoulder in admiration of his surroundings. No English river was ever bordered more beautifully than this one with its fragrant yellow blossom, its lofty gum-trees and dark swamp oaks that at a little distance resembled firs and vividly recalled a home landscape.

Here, too, rose tall and stately such reeds as in silent armies guard our village streams, and here clustered in bunches of white flowers and bright crimson fruit, the native

raspberry—crude, sour, but by its flavour transporting the Englishman, who plucked and ate, to a certain garden where he had once gathered an improved version of the fruit, and at the same time became possessor of a commodity that he did not particularly want.

There was not a sound from the camp at his back, nor did there seem any danger ahead as he idled along with his hands behind him, half expecting to hear a light footstep and see the provoking lips and lovely limbs of the first woman who had ever laughed at, and defied him.

He felt the fleeting touch of those velvet lips yet, and the lissom waist that his hands had spanned, had given him a new sensation as to the elasticity of a woman's body. And to find a pride of glance in a savage that matched his own, combined with a spirit that beat his, was another of those

odd discoveries to which he had more than once found himself committed, increasing his opinion of woman as game superior to any other kind that earth affords.

Involuntarily the hand that had lifted to strip off his shooting jacket, halted and dropped to his side.

Safety, honour, all the traditions of a life that was of some value in this world's mart lay on the other side of the river, and on this hither one no more than the chance of seeing a savage beaten on her own ground, and by her own weapons.

To punish her—to make her suffer, above all to be recognised as her master—these considerations kept his coat hanging to his shoulder, and sent him farther on his path by the river's edge, but all at once he stopped and was on the point of retracing his steps when the echo of a girl's voice

reached him, and in the wink of an eyelid he had recognised it for Yuntha's. His pulses leaped as he went forward—the hurry of his steps startled, and brought him presently to a halt. He was probably rushing to disenchantment, and if the girl once permitted herself to be caught he might swim the river (now becoming deep and broad) and return heart-whole to his kangaroo-hunting and his ulterior duties; but these were scarcely in his mind, as after that brief battle between inclination and common sense he stole softly as any aborigine on the pair seated beneath the acacia, and prepared to overhear their conversation without any particular sensation of eavesdropping.

The girl's back suggested rather less of her shape than an average English maiden's might at a ball, but that of her companion struck the stranger with a curious sort of

recognition, as one who perceives home landmarks in a strange city.

But before he had time to hear a syllable the pair detected him, and while Yuntha sprang to her feet, seeming to be on the point of diving into the water after the water-moles who had sunk like stones to the bottom, on hearing the stranger's approach, Billy merely looked round and grunted, then resumed his inspection of the landscape, so that the girl and man were as practically alone as when they had faced each other for the first time.

'You boxed my ears yesterday,' said the Englishman, gravely, 'won't you shake hands with me to-day?'

She timidly held out her brown palm, and blushed when he stooped his head and kissed it. Was she more dangerous so than in advance or retreat? He was not

sure till she lifted her eyes to his, and straight through his heart there darted a pang that startled him. He turned pale, and Yuntha, thinking that the pain of his wound had driven the blood from his cheek, involuntarily put out her arms as though to save him from falling.

'So it was not the Neilyeri?' he said, swiftly, and looking for some sign of shame in her face.

'No,' she said, simply, then bent her head a moment in deep thought, yet as one who listens. 'There is some disturbance in the camp,' she said to Billy; 'can they have discovered his escape already? But the hunters have not returned, and the old chiefs are usually asleep at this hour.'

'If he wants his life,' said Billy, facing round, 'he'll just run for it, or swim, for they're after him like a pack of hounds, if

I don't mistake. Come,' he added, briefly, and pointed to the distant line of coast hills; but the Englishman stood immovable, with his eyes fixed on the girl, and said, 'You wish me to go?'

Perhaps all the chances and possibilities of what she renounced showed in her beautiful eyes, and cried out in her voice as with almost a sob, she echoed, 'Go!'

'No, I shall stay,' he said, and folded his arms, and turned his back to the river.

'In one minute they will be here,' said Yuntha, pale and wan in her excitement; 'you have no chance of life with them, but Billy will take you to a place of safety, and across the Bush to Bathurst.'

But while her ears listened, and her blue eyes deepened and darkened with fear, the Englishman stood firm and showed no sign of flight.

'Do you value your life so lightly?' she said; 'hark! they are coming—they are in sight—go, go!' and she pushed him towards the river.

But he caught the slender hands and held them fast; their eyes met, and he knew himself to be little better than a madman, as he said, 'I will go, if you will come with me.'

The cries of the pursuers were already in their ears, Monana's voice outshrieking all. In ten seconds the Englishman would be overtaken, and his shrift, as Yuntha well knew, short.

Only ten seconds, and in one her resolve was taken.

'Come,' she said, holding out her hand as simply as if she were doing the most natural thing in the world, and plunged with him into the river, pursued by a shower of darts as they swam to the

opposite bank; then, all dripping as they were, ran like hind and doe towards the bush with a fleetness that the wind might hardly have outstripped, so that the shouts of the pursuers grew each moment more faint, and had altogether ceased when by intricate paths they reached a fastness known only to herself and Billy; and with a sob of relief, the girl cried, 'We have reached the refuge, and you are saved!'

But even as he realised his safety, he fainted at her feet, for in that breathless flight his wound had reopened, and his shirt was scarlet with a stream of blood that even yet continued to flow.

CHAPTER VII.

'Take ye the rings off your fingers,
Put them on his right hand,
To let him know when he does wake,
His love was at his command.'

At night the bush is always fragrant, and the forest animal life begins. As the moon rises, all sorts of curious sights and sounds assert themselves, and the old legends of the fairies and pixies recur to the mind as facts.

This night life that is made up of unexpected exquisite scents, soft footfalls, and gentle flittings of bird and animal unseen by day, with the wild fresh air, and solemn rocking of the pines overhead, might make

a man think who never had thought before, and the Englishman thought his fill when wakening at midnight he looked up at his star-spangled canopy, and tried to remember what had happened. A couch of green fern was beneath him, but who had plucked it? At his side were laid food and water, and the smart in his shoulder had ceased—on putting up his hand to it he found that it had been newly dressed, and leaves placed between his stiffened shirt and his skin.

And yet he was alone save for the voices of the forest, and his heart sank as he looked around and knew that Yuntha had disappeared.

In that moment of bitterness he told himself that she had saved him only to leave him to perish, but the food at his side gave a gentler interpretation to her absence, and he lifted himself on one arm, and while

he ate scarcely appreciated the skill that had provided the meal.

For the fish she had waded breast high in a lagoon, and instead of spearing them had chased and seized their slippery bodies in her slender hands, then cooked them by fire produced in a way as no civilised man would have supposed possible. A species of bread too she had produced in the same manner, and the gourd that held his draught of water was one of those ingenious contrivances that none but the hand of a woman could devise.

But when he had ate and drunk, his couch of fern grew intolerable, and a restlessness seized him that brought his head a little nearer the stars, and sent him on short quests that in every instance resulted in new discoveries. But he did not find the one he wanted, and came back disconsolate each time to his starting-point, at

last lying down to sleep without any particular expectation of waking in the world of the living to-morrow. Yet invisible hands must surely have shed over him the fern and grass that fell thick and soft on him by-and-by; and an ear so fine and delicate that the bending of a blade of grass, the rustle of a leaf, or the breaking of a twig, could not escape it, watched over his slumbers so that no harmful thing might come nigh him, and peaceful as a child rocked in its mother's arms, the white man slept. But with morning the vigil was relaxed, and in the wild fresh scents and sounds that greeted his opening eyes, the Englishman found not one trace of the presence of the girl whose image had haunted his dreams.

He looked around him and knew that in the midst of this teeming forest life, of its bountiful provisions for its creatures, he

must yet starve, for with all his civilisation he had not mastered one of the arts which a savage must either learn, or perish from lack of knowing.

He was alone in the bush—a thicket, ten yards of which from any given point meant an aimless wandering that must result in death—and she had saved him from caprice, and flown homeward to her black lover by way of consolation.

Nevertheless he would make his toilette, and rashly he followed his ear till it guided him to a little runnel in which he dipped his face and head, then washed his hands, and would have washed his blood-stained shirt, but that he did not know how to dry it, and so wore it back to the point whence he had diverged, where a most delightful surprise awaited him.

Breakfast smoked by the side of his deserted couch, testifying by its odour and

heat that it had not been there longer than a few moments, so that the bearer of it might be suspected as not far off.

'Breakfast, sir?' said a charming voice close at hand, and there emerged from behind a tree Yuntha, who had made her toilette, too, and refreshed her leaves so that she had the advantage over his scarlet shirt, and had a fine air of independence as she advanced to serve him.

'Did you sleep well?' she said, as she kneeled to the dressed kangaroo on its burning embers; then, as he made no answer, looked up and met his eyes.

'Did you?' he said.

'I am used to the bush,' she said, and signing to him to eat was gone from his side, leaving him tantalised by an only half-grasped vision of fresh morning loveliness, after which he dashed in vain—the trees had swallowed her up—and

he returned, baffled, to the meal her skill had provided.

So she could love but not trust him—was the fault to be found in her conduct or his?

He looked a cheerful image of broad-shouldered misery as he sat down with his back to the breakfast, hoping that his abstinence would bring her from her concealment; and, indeed, it was not long before a timid shape approached him, and an anxious voice said, 'Isn't it good? And I took so much trouble to catch him! And you will want all your strength,' she said, shaking her head, 'for the moment Billy comes you must push on to Bathurst; and he may be here at any moment. I cannot think why he is so long.'

'And you?' he said, involuntarily.

'I shall go home,' she said simply. 'Monana will be angry, but Djarrah will not

be—he would have done as much for you himself—but it would have been better if you had come with Billy.'

'You love Djarrah?' he said, as she kneeled by the rude stove and offered meat to him in her beautiful brown hands.

'Yes,' she answered gently; 'we are cousins'—we have been all our lives together, wanderers in a strange land, and some day we hope to go back . . . But you must eat,' she said, still holding the food towards him.

He sprang up and took it from her hands saying, 'You have served me often, Yuntha, and now I will serve you;' and handing her to the couch sat down beside her.

Probably no kangaroo meat ever served by fingers and thumbs was more delicious to man and woman than was this, so that when all was eaten, one of them sighed, and the other wished she had provided more.

Hunger had overpowered politeness, and scarcely a word had been exchanged over the bones that each picked with a simplicity of intention that lent almost a barbaric dignity to the man's proceedings, while the girl performed gracefully enough a feat that was as natural to her as to breathe.

But almost before he had finished his sigh she was gone from beside him, and washing her face in the runnel of water that he had visited that morning.

She looked up at him with a rain of diamond drops on her face and hair as he approached, then blushed, and said,—

'Perhaps there would be time—before Billy comes—for me to wash your shirt?'

'I will wash it myself,' he said, and without more ado had it off, and was kneeling with bare shoulders smooth as satin on the opposite side of the water before she could

stop him and, forgetful of his wound, began to scrub at it with the energy of a hundred washer-women.

'Your shoulder!' cried Yuntha, in horror, and frightened, perplexed, she knew not why, at the dazzling whiteness of his skin; but he only scrubbed the harder, upon which she caught the flannel from him, or thought she did, but he had kept a corner to which he held like grim death, and the harder she tugged, the more did he, till the girl lost her temper and the man laughed.

'This is pure obstinacy,' she cried, relinquishing the bone of contention with such suddenness as sent the Englishman backwards with more celerity than grace, while with the air of a princess who had only stooped to play washerwoman, she marched indignantly away.

But her dignity made his opportunity,

and he had intercepted her before she had gone a dozen yards.

'*You* shall wash it,' he said, penitently, 'and *I'll* hang it out to dry.'

He ventured to take her hand as he spoke, and she allowed herself to be led back to the runnel, while with the air of one who magnanimously renounces all chances of glory in a difficult enterprise, the Englishman sat down at a little distance, and intently watched the proceedings.

Through the large flat leaves of the blue gum overhead, the sun's rays could not penetrate, and the air was almost cool, but to wash without soap is perhaps fatiguing work, for Yuntha's colour rose as the shirt approached whiteness, and the happy moment (to the Englishman) of hanging it out, grew more distant as she sighed and said,

'I wish Billy would come!'

Alas! Poor Billy was not likely to arrive—his body had been made a mere pincushion of darts as he interposed himself between the savages and the flying pair, and that he had not been finally despatched was due to the fleetness of foot that carried him to a hiding-place, where he might bleed to death or starve, since no human creature was likely to come nigh him.

'And supposing Billy doesn't come?' said the Englishman.

The girl dropped the shirt, and turned as pale surely as any white woman might have done.

'But he knows where to find us,' she said; 'this is a secret haunt that not a living soul knows of but he and I; and Monana would not harm him, he has followed us these fifteen years, and is friendly with all the tribes.'

'Did Billy teach you English?' said the young man gravely; 'and how to box ears, and the airs of a coquette?'

'What is a coquette?' said Yuntha, leaning forward on her slender hands.

'A woman who runs away from a man one minute, and after him the next.'

'Have I run after you?' said the girl, thoughtfully; 'and to be sure I have run beside you. But were you thinking of an Englishwoman?'

She was rinsing and wringing the water out of the flannel as she spoke, and he thought her glance gave him license to approach her a little more nearly, and take a sleeve of the much-contested garment, as he replied,

'If you weren't brown, I would swear you are an Englishwoman yourself.'

The girl stooped hastily, and picked up the other sleeve, and with the drooping

shirt hanging between them the pair walked gingerly enough to a sunburnt bit of grass, on which they carefully stretched the *casus belli*, and left it alone in its glory.

'Your wound will not need dressing before night,' she said, as they walked side by side; 'but Billy is late. I think I will go a little way, and see if I can meet him.'

'Don't,' said the Englishman, eagerly. 'I'm sure to be potted by a native, and that would be such a pity after all the trouble you've taken to save me!'

She shook her head and laughed.

'You are quite safe,' she said; 'not even Djarrah could find his way here without a clue—the difficulty will be to get you away without being overtaken by the tribe.'

'And *if* Billy does not turn up?' persisted the Englishman.

Yuntha turned pale, and clasped her hands as one in sudden fear.

'He *must!*' she cried; then added in the same breath, 'Oh! what have I done! Without Billy I cannot save you.'

'Don't you think we're pretty comfortable as we are?' suggested the Englishman, quite unabashed; 'I'll catch the game, and you can do the cooking!'

'And the washing?' said Yuntha, demurely.

'Oh! I'll help,' he cried eagerly; then added persuasively, 'don't you think it is about time we saw about snaring our dinner? Only we've got no weapons.'

Yuntha laughed and extended her ten slender fingers.

'How did I get your breakfast?' she said; then, with all her brightness clouded, added, 'I wonder if anything has happened to poor Billy?'

The Englishman devoutly hoped that something *had*, but his blue eyes looked almost as guileless as hers as he said,

'Supposing we go and look for him? He may not be far off, but wounded.'

The girl started from his side, at the thought, and ran before him till she reached a tree, up which she swarmed like a squirrel, amazing the Englishman, who on reaching the tree found notches cut in its side by which she had ascended.

Neither by foot nor eye could he follow her, and it struck him that this was perhaps her sleeping chamber, whose outlook permitted her to keep a keen watch out on the surrounding country.

And he was right.

At the very summit of the tree the leaves presently parted to allow a charming brown head to appear, and a pair of blue eyes scanned the valley that far

below and distant about five miles lay stretched before her. She could faintly see the miams, and could even make out that there was no excitement or running to and fro—and with something like a pang she told herself that not even Djarrah cared enough for, to pursue her. A sudden sense of loneliness pierced the girl's soul—and a little fear, for when love the pilgrim, knocks loud at the human heart that has often said nay to him in other guise, it is with trembling and doubt that she unlatches the door, and sees him standing on the threshold, less beautiful perhaps in the reality than her fancy had painted him.

The leaves closed over the girl's head, and with her arms clasped round the fork of the tree, she laid her cheek down on them, and fell soundly and sweetly asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

His hound is to the hunting gane,
His hawk to fetch the wild fowl hame;
His lady's ta'en another mate,
Sae we may mak' our dinner sweet.

Now when Monana witnessed the elopement that had all the simplicity of most unpremeditated feats, she leaped at once to the conclusion that the pair had fallen in love at first sight, and that Yuntha was as fatally willing to sacrifice herself to a white man's caprice as her mother and grandmother had been before her.

'*Kill him!*' she cried to the men behind her, then snatched a spear from one of them, and herself leaped into the water

after the fugitives, but they swam like ducks, and having a good start, kept it, disappearing far ahead of her in the bush, and with none of those darts sticking in their backs that were intended for them.

Billy was less fortunate, for as he had naturally taken to his heels after the runaways, he was detected at once as an accomplice, and it was with difficulty that he managed to reach a place of safety, where he swooned from loss of blood, and, so far as he knew, died, and ended all.

As he, too, vanished from Monana's sight, and some lurking doubts she had felt of his integrity leaped to conviction, she uttered a cry fierce as the 'slogan's deadly yell,' and dashed forward at a speed with which the men who followed her, vainly tried to compete, though before long she stopped, feeling the madness, the uselessness of this headlong chase into chaos.

With as much chance of success might one spring from a headland into the ocean in pursuit of a particular fish who had for a moment risen to the surface, as search in these virgin fastnesses of the bush for the girl who knew them better than any native in the land, and who could make her way across country without guides, weapons, or even the commonest adjuncts to life that the merest savage requires. And presently Djarrah would be returning, Djarrah whose nature had been so softened by her influence and teaching, that his fiercest passions were under her control, and till she should come to him willingly, he would not enforce the virtual betrothal that existed between them, and was now rewarded with the usual payment accorded to noble natures — betrayal.

Monana would go back to the encampment, meet and tell him the truth; for the rest, the tribe that she had adopted as her

own would know how to follow and punish the culprits, and her heart swelled with rage against Yuntha as she turned homewards. Was there not in the girl the false, fickle blood of the Englishman — had she not leaped into his arms at a word, a look, while fierce wooing had been needed to subdue her mother, and grandmother before her?

A curious joy stole into Monana's veins — she had always set Djarrah before Yuntha in her heart, and now he would be her own, he would hate and despise the girl, and choose a wife from among these despised people, whom she loved so infinitely better than those Maori-folks that roused in Yuntha so keen a pride.

Why pursue the flying pair? Let them fulfil their fate — let the girl suffer that to which she had doomed herself, inevitably the same fate as that of others before her.

On a sudden Monana's blood cooled, and

she walked calmly enough into the encampment just in time to meet the returning hunters with Djarrah at their head.

Then she ran to him, then with something of the cold, slow comfort in evil tidings that none but old age knows, she told him the truth, always with that hidden reservation in her mind that now he was *her own*, son of her son, heart of her heart, whose father was born before the white man had beguiled her, and driven her out like a new Hagar with an Ishmael at her side, and his young child lying at her breast.

Djarrah had met her with eager, flaming eyes, for rejoicing in the first tenderness he had ever provoked from Yuntha, he had that morning gone out to his work like a giant refreshed, and feeling sure of possessing before long the coy, exquisite creature who had made his pattern of womanhood, and from whom darker copies had never

once succeeded in distracting him. And he had hailed with satisfaction the signs of confusion and excitement that met his eyes and ears on his return, for what could they mean but that the Englishman had escaped, as he had meant him to do? And yet the noble fellow blamed himself as with treachery as he advanced, for might he not have trusted Yuntha, and would she not reproach him with his lack of faith?

Nevertheless his step was buoyant, his face beautiful with hope, as half-way across the camp he was met by Monana, who spoke some words to him that seemed to turn him to stone as he stood, while gradually the rich blood ebbed away from his face, till its pallor was even more piteous to see than the mortal paleness of the man who is white.

His hand stiffened on the boomerang he held, but felt no impulse to strike. In that moment love was stronger in him

than vengeance, and only the consciousness that Yuntha had betrayed him—that he had lost her—filled his stricken heart.

Then, staggering a little, and as a child who, hearing bad news of its absent mother, sets vaguely out to seek, and ask her if it be true, Djarrah crossed to that ring of emerald coutch-grass, over which he had never stepped, and without a thought of it, drew aside the curtain of the miam and looked in.

She *must* be there—but no, there was her empty couch, and yonder her little ornaments and pretty treasures fastened to the rude walls, and at his feet the half-finished belt that she had been weaving when Monana had rashly let her go forth alone.

And that very morning when her blue eyes had looked at him so sweetly she must have had that in her mind which a mere

word from the white man could convert into treachery, and without a thought of himself, or the familiar life she was leaving, she could put her hand in the stranger's and flee with him 'like a love-bird flying to her mate,' as Monana had shrieked, and this was his proud, delicate Yuntha. . . . A thought struck him once, but he thrust it away. If she had only meant to start the white man on his difficult journey she would have returned long ere this, for she was brave and would not have feared her reception, but she did not wish to return, and out yonder she and her white lover were together in the bush—alone.

Not a sound escaped him—not a muscle of his face moved. Heroic in mental as in bodily suffering, these poor savages might teach us many a lesson of bravery and patience, and put to shame the tears and cries with which we meet the reverses of fate.

Then, while Monana stood apart, some of the men came near and taunted him with his lack of manliness in mourning one who had been so light of heart, and one young aborigine chief, rival to Djarrah in his strength and skill, if not in beauty, and who had secretly coveted Yuntha and been repulsed by her, now gave vent to his rage and disappointment by saying that for his part he thought the camp well rid of her, applying to her an epithet that he swore he knew her to deserve.

It was the first and last insult to Yuntha that Djarrah ever heard, for without stirring a hair's breadth from where he stood, he lifted his arm, and struck the liar such a blow between his eyes, as brought him like a stone to earth, where he lay longer than there seemed any reason for, till on lifting they found him dead.

Then loud murmurs of wrath and anger

rose, headed by a woman's passionate shriek as she threw herself on the yet warm body, and cursed the girl whose beauty had seduced his heart from her, while Monana trembled, knowing the aborigine law, which demanded a life for a life, whether taken by a stranger, or one of themselves. But before one of the hundred hands outstretched to seize could touch him, Djarrah, with a sudden putting forth of his whole matchless strength, had leaped from their midst, and taken to the river. She drew her breath hard as he dived and vanished, only to reappear out of reach of the spears that followed him, and with straining eyes saw him disappear almost at the exact point where the Englishman and Yuntha had entered the bush.

Then a cruel, slow look of satisfaction overspread her features, for she knew that

in the tribe's pursuit of Djarrah, the runaway pair would almost certainly be discovered, and vengeance executed upon them.

No need now for her to urge pursuit. There was not a woman or child in the camp, but would by their tears and alarms have urged on the chiefs to speed, for would not the dead man, unavenged, return to haunt them, to make loud noises in the night, lead them into wrong tracks, and afflict both their bodies and souls with mortal sickness?

So that within less than an hour a young man with his blood on fire through jealousy, and grief for an unpremeditated crime, had drawn pursuit towards two devoted, light-hearted young people, who just then happened to be engaged in eating bread and honey.

CHAPTER IX.

O whaur were ye, my merry young man,
That I pay meat and fee;
Ye wouldna waken me out o' my sleep,
When my love ye did see.

THE Englishman had watched at the foot of the tree for Yuntha till the heat overmastered him, and he fell asleep.

When he woke, it was with the conviction that she had flown—for he was beginning to learn her by now, and to lay traps for her like any other wild forest creature whose habits are only to be found out by degrees.

He traced his way back to his sleeping quarters, and in an instant knew that she

had been there, for his couch was newly spread with ferns fresh pulled, and above it a rough lean-to of bark had been constructed, that would at least shield him from the flights of those strange bodies across his limbs that had disturbed him in his dreams last night.

All at once he thought of his shirt, and set off running for where he had left it, half expecting to find it ironed—for what could not those clever fingers of hers accomplish?

But it was not ironed—not even particularly well washed, he thought to himself ungratefully as he put it on, and wondered suspiciously how she came to know the name of it.

Djarrah did not wear one—but perhaps she had seen other white men, and run away from them often enough to learn how to perform the feat gracefully, but most

good things are monotonous in repetition, and he wished she would change the *rôle*, and show him if she could fill others equally well.

His wound pained him confoundedly, and how was a man to dress his own shoulder? If Billy did not arrive by sundown (and the Englishman had very little fear that he would), she would have to attend to his wound herself.

Perhaps if he groaned she would take compassion on him, and come out from her hiding-place; but the ruse was unsuccessful, though he found a satisfactory reason for her hard-heartedness before long in a savoury smell that gradually stole into his nostrils, and looking round, he saw Yuntha, laughing, and holding a cooked bird in her hands.

'You are always hungry,' she said, as she placed the food in its green leaves

before him. 'Do all you whites eat so much more than we savages?' she added, stepping back a little, and surveying him.

The Englishman looked from the innocent duck (that he longed to eat) to the girl, and wondered if all he had heard of the blacks' appetites had been moonshine.

'Are we so greedy?' he said, and felt his hunger sink a little, and some manly shame that only by a woman's exertions it could be stayed.

'No, no!' she cried, with instant intuition of his thoughts; 'but you see you have been so badly brought up, and it's not *your* fault that you are so helpless!'

He looked up with a comical air at his young censor, then longed to box her ears as soundly as she had boxed his—for he perceived her pity of him to be sincere, not affected.

'You shall feed me no longer!' he cried,

and starting up, marched off, fully expecting that she would follow.

But the girl did nothing of the sort. To be sure she smiled, but her smile was quickly succeeded by a look of anxiety very sad to see, and she wrung her hands, as in a low voice she cried to herself, 'Oh! *where* is Billy?'

But as the Englishman's proud back (all newly-adorned) disappeared, she looked up, seeing an ominous red patch on his shoulder that sent her after him like a flash of light.

'I must dress your wound,' she said; then as he still stalked forward, she ran ahead of him, and the path being narrow, extended her arms across it, and barred his way.

For a moment he trembled on the verge of seizing her; the next he was kneeling, and the girl's light fingers were busy in stripping one arm from his shirt, and re-

moving the soaked leaves that, steeped in a secret preparation well known to the savages, assuages and heals spear-wounds with inconceivable rapidity.

She left him alone for a few minutes, while she gathered, and steeped fresh leaves in the decoction she had carefully prepared overnight; then applying them to his shoulder, felt her admiration rise, as he neither winced nor stirred under their smart.

'These English can be brave,' she thought; and as he looked up, his head being so near her own, he caught the look in her eyes, and understood it.

'Are we cowards, too?' he said.

'This is not pain,' she said, as having finished her task, she moved a little away from him. 'I could tell you what pain is, and how a savage would bear it.'

'Tell me about it,' said the Englishman,

eagerly, and took her hand and led her to the stump of a tree on which she sat down absently, and as if her thoughts were far away.

He was content, as he desired no more than to look at her, and never once thought of the luncheon he had been too proud to eat; but when she came out of her day-dream with a start, she thought of the duck, and not of her people's bravery.

'Won't you eat it?' she said. 'You'll be so cross if you don't!'

'Are your men cross when they are hungry?' he said, smiling.

'A little,' she said, looking at him thoughtfully; 'but a savage has only himself to blame if he has caught no game or fish during the day. But you poor souls must starve if some one does not serve you, and you cry out like babies whose nurses have forgotten you.'

'But we shoot and fish,' said the Englishman, rather crestfallen. 'It is the wives—I mean the servants—who bake and brew, and you won't even allow me to wash my own clothes.'

The girl laughed. 'You shoot for sport, not to keep the breath in your bodies,' she said; 'and how can you take pride in the food that is put before you many times a day, not because you are hungry, but because a big bell calls you, just as if you were a sheep?'

'Who told you that?' said the Englishman, laughing outright.

'Billy.'

'Was Billy ever in England?' the young man asked, curiously.

'He lived many years with English people, but he could not bear the life, and ran away into the bush,' said the girl. 'How could he help running away? But

he is getting over the dreadful effects of it now,' she added, nodding.

'You despise our life?' he said.

'No,' she said, wistfully; 'but I pity you. Billy did not tell me true about your looks; but he could not have made it up about the houses, and the way you live, and the stories you tell, and how cruel you are to one another, and how badly you treat your old people.'

'Stop!' cried the Englishman, laughing. 'It's my turn now. Do you never tell stories, Yuntha? Does your grandmother know that Billy taught you English?'

The girl hung her head, and sadly blushed.

'I told her no stories,' she said at last; 'she thought Billy was dumb—except to me, he has never uttered a syllable since he settled on the outskirts of our encampment fifteen years ago, and how could she suspect

me of learning English from a man who is dumb?'

'And of course that was not deceit,' said the Englishman, quietly.

'I could not betray him,' she said, 'and it was not until I was old enough to choose for myself, that he spoke to me, and asked if I could learn it.'

'And being a woman, you said yes.'

'And being a man, what would you have said?'

'Declined the trouble.'

'Ah, yes! Poor thing!' said the girl, with a fine air of pity. 'Billy said you were all dreadfully lazy, and the better born you were, the worse you spelt!'

'Can *you* spell, Miss?' said the Englishman, with some acerbity.

'Of course,' she said, proudly. 'Billy is a very accomplished person.'

'Did you ever write a love-letter?' he said.

'Is it a point of honour with an English lady to answer every question that is asked her?' said Yuntha, with a mischievous smile.

'Billy has taught you excellent English,' said the young man, irrelevantly. 'Where could he possibly have picked it up?'

'He talked very bad grammar at first,' said the girl, shaking her lovely brown head; 'but he got me some lesson-books, and after that I taught *him*.'

'And who taught your grandmother?' said the Englishman.

'She lived among the whites for years,' said Yuntha, gently. 'I think that is why she left Maori-land, because she had displeased her tribe by going among the white people.'

'And your mother?' he said, looking at her keenly, and thinking how, in the most perfect types of patrician English beauty,

he had never seen united the matchless points and signs of high breeding that he saw in this young savage.

'She died young,' said the girl, gently. 'I can just remember her, and that is all.'

'Had she blue eyes?' he said; 'and did she marry an Englishman of good birth?'

Yuntha looked up, startled, then said, 'Do white men marry savages?'

'If love is stronger than common sense,' he replied, gravely.

'What is common sense?' she said, looking puzzled. 'I never found anything about that in my school-books.'

'Common sense is a disagreeable voice that bids you do exactly the reverse of what you wish,' said the young man, not pausing to take much trouble about his definition, in his desire to make her look at him again.

But she did not hear him—her delicate

ear had caught a distinct sound made by no four-footed or flying creature; and as each moment she grew more certain of its approach, suddenly she threw up both arms with a gesture of delight, and, turning to the Englishman, exclaimed,—

'*Billy!*'

CHAPTER X.

How can I live, how shall I live?
How can I live for thee?
See ye not where my red heart's blude
Runs trickling down my knee?

THE Englishman had sprung to his feet, and caught her hands in his own.

'Yuntha,' he cried, passionately, 'you will not go back to the tribe—you will stay with Billy and me?'

'I must go,' she said, in a whisper; but he felt her hands grow cold, and a shiver go through her slender body, and he swore in his heart that if she went, it should not be alone.

'He comes slowly,' said the girl, bending her head to listen. 'Oh, poor Billy! I fear he has been wounded.'

Perhaps as she went to meet her old friend, she forgot the strong clasp that supported her, so that, hand in hand, and trembling, the beautiful young people went; but though they wandered hither and thither, nowhere could they find a trace of Billy, and sadly the girl came back to her seat, and sat down as if she had forgotten all about the Englishman.

'They have killed him,' she said, 'and perhaps they will kill Djarrah too—and I shall not dare to go back.'

'Come with me through the bush, Yuntha,' cried the young man, eagerly, 'and I will leave you in safe hands, or you shall come to England,' he added, after a slight pause.

'No,' she said; 'my home is here: I should pine and die in your English cities. What you call life we call captivity—have you ever thought of it?' she went on, with a kind of horror in her voice, 'how in

every choked breath you draw, you are denying yourself of all you were born to —freedom, air, light, what every forest creature enjoys and glories in?'

'But we do not always live in cities,' said the young man, laughing; 'and even there we can breathe. It's our moral atmosphere that is wrong, not our physical one.'

'Then was it the truth Billy told me about you white people?' said the girl.

'And have these people among whom you dwell no faults?' he said.

'Yes,' she said, slowly; 'but they spring chiefly from necessity and their way of life. They kill their babies sometimes——'

'Did you ever kill one, Yuntha?' cried the Englishman, with a look of horror.

'And steal their enemies' kidney-fat now and then,' went on the girl, with a covert smile.

'And your own people, the Maories, have *they* no faults?' he said.

'I have never known my own people,' she said, mournfully. 'There are only Monana's tradition and stories to make me understand them; but I think we are a brave race. A man who breaks one of his legs in battle will coolly go on one side, and fasten it together with his girdle and splinters of wood, and then he will go back and fight till he is killed! Another who has been wounded, and fears mortification, will dig a hole in the ground, and put his leg in it, and make his friends heap live coals round the limb till it is literally burnt off, and he will not make a sound while it is burning, and be angry if any one pities him!'

'We can't beat that,' said the Englishman; 'but we can fight, Yuntha, and know how to bear hard knocks when we are beaten.'

'We are never beaten,' she said, proudly,

and her eyes kindled, and her cheek glowed; 'we may abandon, but we do not yield a position. Once your people were fighting the Maories, who had entrenched themselves against your guns, and when they were quite overpowered, and you were waiting for them to surrender, suddenly the Maori garrison came out of the entrenchment on to the open, and in a silent, compact body, without hurry of any kind, advanced upon the *cordon* of troops that surrounded them. Their principal chiefs and the women and children were in the midst, and though a terrific fire was opened upon them, they moved on with the same tranquillity, not a cry or sound escaping from even a woman or child! Would your English men, women, and children, behave like that?'

'I don't think our women would,' said the young man, meditatively; 'they would probably have screamed, and clung to their dressing-cases.'

'Our women can fight,' said Yuntha, proudly. 'Once when you had brought a thousand men against a handful of ours, your general sent word that we had proved our bravery,—that we were surrounded, but if we surrendered, our lives should be spared. We sent back to say, "We will fight for ever, and ever, and ever!" Then they said, "Send away the women." But our men answered, "The women will fight as well as we." And the battle recommenced.'

'And would you fight?' exclaimed the Englishman.

'To the death,' she replied, swiftly. 'There is no tame blood in my veins,' she added, as one ashamed of her own vehemence: 'my father and mother alike were wanderers, and I have the savage wandering blood in me—I shall have it to my dying day.'

She had started up, and the Englishman drew his breath hard, and tried to fancy

this inspired young nymph in her green leaves set down in the midst of a London drawing-room—how she would madden all the men, and how the women would look at her through their eyeglasses, and damn her with the single monosyllable 'Black.'

Yet she was scarcely brown, and surely her skin was paler to-day than it had been yesterday, and for the first time he saw a resemblance in her face that must have struck him long ago but for her colour.

'Yuntha,' he cried, suddenly, 'had you a white father?'

Her colour sank—for the first time he saw fear in her eyes, and her lips trembled, but did not speak.

'Would it not be a disgrace to have a white father, and yet be brown?' she said; then added in the same breath, 'Are the English ladies so *very* beautiful?'

'Some of them;' and yet on casting about in his mind he could not find one who was fit to tie Yuntha's shoe-string.

'And what do they wear?' said the girl.

'Clothes,' he said.

'I know that,' she said, a little impatiently. 'Billy told me about that, but what do they call them?'

'Bibs and tuckers,' he said, gravely, 'and—and stockings,' he added as an after-thought.

'Poor things!' said the girl, looking down at her own exquisitely arched bare, brown feet. 'How can they run or climb trees in stockings?'

'Perhaps they don't try,' he said, laughing.

'And that reminds me,' she said, looking at him slyly, much as one schoolboy may at another secure in the possession of certain sweeties; 'did you ever eat bread and honey?'

'Often,' he said, valiantly; 'but what has that to do with climbing trees?'

'You shall see,' she said, laughing, and ran away; while being a man, he groaned

and thought of the despised duck, wondering if his manhood permitted him to suggest its body as the first course, and the honey as the second.

Soon she came back with a white and luscious comb piled up in a sheet of bark, and in her other hand bore a fresh cooked damper, from which she cut him a slice and bade him eat the honey, whose strengthening and satisfying properties were beyond belief.

If he looked a little rueful as he fell to, cutting it into squares with his clasp-knife and passing it under his moustache with as little litter as possible, he presently found the taste in him grow by what he fed on, so that perhaps he had consumed a few pounds when he stopped and gazed around. And surely, never was bread and honey, even if served to a queen, eaten in a finer chamber than here, with the eternal forest surrounding them with its flitting shadows and golden sunshine.

But one of the shadows seemed to lengthen curiously, and by slow degrees to draw nearer and nearer to them, its approach rendered inaudible by the noise of a laughing jackass overhead.

And the shadow had eyes that long and keenly watched the young man and maiden, yet could take exception to neither look, word, nor gesture that passed between them. They ate their bread and honey like any other lady and gentleman whom circumstances had somewhat scamped in their attire, and the matter of table service.

Presently he groaned, and Yuntha started up like a fawn, and ran to him, calling him her dear Billy, her dearest friend, and asking him why he had been so long in coming, and was he wounded?

Somehow the thoughtlessness, the mistake of her flight, for the first time struck her, as the poor fellow's glazed eyes closed, and he fell back in a stupor that seemed the forerunner of death.

'He is starving,' she cried; and laying him gently down, flew to the honey, and fed him with it, rejoiced to find that he could swallow, so that presently he opened his eyes, and looked anxiously at the two young faces above him.

'You see, my dear, I couldn't get to you before,' he said, painfully, 'and I shouldn't be here now, only a gin happened to come across my tracks, and took me up on her back and carried me by bits a good part of the way, and I crawled the rest. And you've taken care of her, sir?' he said, looking searchingly at the Englishman.

'No; she has taken care of me,' said the young man; but his eyes met Billy's fearlessly, and the man was satisfied.

'Oh, poor Billy!' said the girl, tears rolling down her cheeks as she smoothed his hair matted with blood, and the sweats of his long agony; 'it was all our running away that has been the death of you!'

'No, no,' he said, faintly, 'it's only loss

of blood and hunger. I feel better already, and if you could wash my wounds, my dear, I could get to work, and start you off quick.'

She did not hear his latter words, for she had flown off to get water; but the Englishman did, and said, 'You will send her back to the camp?'

'Send her back to certain death?' said Billy, curtly. 'No—though she may be overtaken and killed yet, thanks to you.'

But Yuntha's return checked the words on the Englishman's lips; and when she had bathed and dressed his wounds, with many a cry of pity at their number and extent, Billy ate some more honey, then bade her go to a certain tree close by that she knew of, and take out of its hollow trunk the articles that she had seen him hide there. And first appeared two tightly wrapped-up opossum rugs, next a throwing stick with a number of short spears for the destruction of animals, a hatchet,

a short, heavy stick for knocking over the smaller kind of bush game, the whole armoury, in short, of a man who takes his life in his hand, and resolves to keep it, when alone he takes his path through the bush. Lastly there was a native woman's bag.

'Two opossum rugs, Billy?' said Yuntha; 'why he will only want one!'

'And you'll want another,' said Billy, who, propped up against a tree, looked less ghastly than he had done half an hour ago.

'I've got one at home,' she said; 'and it will not take me very long to get back.'

'Only you're not going back,' said Billy, calmly; 'years ago we hid them things here on the chance of our running away one of these days; and now you're going to run away in real earnest, my dear, but with *him!*' and he pointed to the vanishing Englishman.

She paled visibly, and looked after him like a wild creature whose impulse to flee or stay must be determined by its impression of what it gazes on; then said, 'Why must I go? would Djarrah wish it?'

CHAPTER XI.

'O Chuse, O Chuse, Lady Marg'ret,' he said,
'O, whether will ye gang or bide?'
'I'll gang, I'll gang, Lord William,' she said,
'For ye hae left me nae other guide.'

'My dear,' said Billy, taking her two brown hands in his, 'are you afraid?'

'A little,' she said, as she looked after the Englishman's diminishing back; 'but why will you drive me away from you? Why can't we hide here—all three together—till Djarrah comes back, and you are able to show *him* the way to Bathurst?'

'I've left a trail of blood along the way,' said Billy, meditatively, 'that even a white man might follow, let alone an aborigine, who'll recognise a footprint as easy as an Englishman 'll recognise a neighbour's face.

But if you're in a mood for a wholesale massacre of three persons, why, then, say the word, and we'll abide it; but now, my dear, I've got to tell you a dreadful secret, but p'r'aps when you know it, you won't hate me so much as I think.'

She looked at him earnestly, but could find no deceit in his honest, ugly face.

'What is it, Billy?' she said, gently.

'I'm not an aborigine at all, my dear—I'm white.'

Yuntha gazed at him for a moment, then burst out laughing, and laughed till the tears stood in her eyes.

'Oh, Billy!' she said at last, 'do you expect me to believe that?'

'What it's cost me to keep myself at that high state of polish nobody knows,' said Billy, shaking his head sadly; 'and as to that wig—so natural like that no one ever suspected it weren't growing—why, the making and the wearing of it has took a good ten years off my life.'

Yuntha had recoiled, and now sat gazing at him with new eyes, in which horror and gladness were equally blended.

'And you abused the white people so!' she said at last; 'why were you so deceitful?' she added, reproachfully.

'Just to feel your two pretty arms round my neck,' said Billy, placidly; 'but there, the paint and the wig was nothing; being dumb bothered me most—it was so strictly against my usual habits. But now, my dear, try and throw your mind back a bit. You recollect living among a lot of men when you were very little; not old enough, p'raps, to notice if they were white or black?'

'Yes,' said the girl, slowly. 'I can remember it—and how kind they were; but one day I was taken away in a big waggon, and one of the men ran after me with my doll.'

'That's *me!*' said Billy, in a voice of pride, 'and, after I'd giver you the doll, I

jumped up behind, without Triangular Bob's ever knowing it, not even when he was stopped in the thickest part of the bush by Cucumber Jack and half-a-dozen bushrangers, who didn't want the gold we were taking to Melbourne, nor yet our noble selves, but only the most loveliest little girl in a white frock, which was yourself,' remarked Billy, parenthetically.

'Who was Cucumber Jack, and why did he want me?' said Yuntha.

'He was your venerable papa, my dear,' said Billy, curtly, 'and I s'pose a bu'st of affection for you had seized him. But, lord, his being your father was just an accident. Why should you concern yourself about it? Sam was your real father, though you've had more than one make-believe since that.

'But anyway,' continued Billy, 'he didn't find what he wanted, for half an hour before, a woman had begged for a lift and made love to you and the Pied Piper, so

that everybody being on the look-out for Cucumber Jack, and nobody for a woman, somehow she mizzled with you in her arms, and it was only by a blest fluke that I caught her up, being wider awake than Bob.'

'Who was Triangular Bob?' said the girl, looking rather bewildered.

'Your guardian *vice* Long Jem, *vice* Sam Sweet,' said Billy. 'O Lord! to think of the lives your valuable little person has cost, first and last! And to be sure I oughtn't to mind if I follow such good company,' he added, cheerfully, 'though what I'd to say to Sam, if he asked if Triangular Bob had fulfilled his trust, goodness knows.'

'What was Bob's trust?' said Yuntha.

Billy shook his head.

'Nobody ever quite knew, my dear—but one part of it was to get you safe over to England, and the other part was to take care of some document that Sam died to

get; but, as things turned out, *I* got you, and Bob got off with the next valuablest thing to yourself.'

'Well, I just stole after the woman, and she led me some way; but the wonderfullest thing was, that by the time I'd found you, your alabaster skin was gone, and you might have passed for a native child anywhere. If it hadn't been for your blue eyes, I'd have sworn you weren't Sam's Sweetheart at all, and to be sure I was a long time before I was fit to introjuce myself to you, seeing that nothing in the shape of a white man durst come near the encampment.'

Yuntha blushed and sighed, then said, 'But how did you deceive us all so, Billy?'

'Well,' said Billy, ruefully, 'painting one's own back ain't the easiest occupation in life, and that wig nearly turned me grey. Then there was practising to be dumb, and how to use those darned weapons—but the rest came easy; not a living soul in the

place guessed that the fool who fetched and carried for them, had the sense of a Christian. And bit by bit you learned their tongue, and forgot your own, till when you got old enough, I taught you.'

'Deceit,' cried Yuntha, 'as Monana had taught me before you.'

'But now there's an end to it,' said Billy, firmly.

Yuntha blushed and hid her eyes; then said, 'But were you not always preaching to me that the savage life was better, purer, happier than the white one? And you abused the white men,' she added, with a quiver in her voice; 'and *he* is not what you represented him.'

'There's good and bad sorts,' said Billy, drily; 'and by luck you seem to have tumbled into the arms of the right one. Sam was right in most things, and his orders were strict—England was the only safe place for you and to England you must go—but, my dear, your turning out brown was a shock

that upset all my plans for you—for even if I got you safe away to England, and Triangular Bob appeared in the very nick of time with the document, what would become of you when you got there? Why, you'd be flouted, and put upon, and your life made a burden to you—and that wasn't Sam's intention at all, so I thought I'd just let matters bide a bit; and they've bided, and bided, my dear, till now you're eighteen years old, and not a finger have I lifted to carry out Sam's wishes. Every day that I saw you, so happy and fair and free, I said to myself—"she was born to this life—she's got the roving blood in her, and if she's taken out of it, she'll die" . . . and then there was Djarrah. No white man 'ud ever love you like that, and you seemed to love *him*."'

'I do,' she cried eagerly. 'I could not bear to leave him, and I love my wild life—I could not breathe in England. Do not try to send me there, Billy, for I should

only run back here again, and Sam couldn't have wished to make me miserable! And I won't go till you are able to walk,' she added, sitting down on the ground beside him; 'for who is going to feed and nurse you, pray, and who is going to *bury* you if you get worse?' she added, with tears in her lovely eyes.

'That's a mere matter of detail,' said Bill, gravely, but with a lurking smile. 'Now you'll just steer straight for old England, where I'll join you, if these darned wounds ever heal up, which I doubt.'

'Why should I go?' she said proudly.

'Sam's orders was strict,' said Billy, slowly, 'and if I disobeyed 'em, not being Triangular Bob, or having any documents to prove you what you ought to be, why what was I to do? Send you home on the chance like, of something turning up? But Sam was right—he's always right in the long run,—and England's the only safe

place for you now. You know every one of the tracks to Bathurst, and when you get there——'

'I will turn round, and come back,' she said.

'To death,' said Billy.

'No, to Djarrah,' she said firmly. 'Does he not know that I am only *saving* the white man—that I shall go back to him and Monana?'

'They've left the encampment,' said Billy, curtly; 'there's been a general bust-up there since you took a swim, promiskis-like, and Djarrah's more likely to join *you* than you to find him. And now if you'll call up that young man, I'll talk to him while I've got breath, for I'm darned if I don't believe it's soon going to leave me altogether.'

But Yuntha did not stir, as she realised the terrible issues to which her rash act had committed Djarrah, and her voice was faint as she said,—'He is jealous, and pursuing us?'

'No, the tribe's in pursuit of *him*,' said Billy, drily; 'and it strikes me we'll all cook up beautifully in one b'iling, if you don't make a start somehow to-night.'

'I am ready,' said the Englishman's voice beside them; but at sound of it Yuntha started violently, and disappeared from their sight among the trees.

CHAPTER XII.

Where was thou bred? Where was thou born;
Where, or in what countrie?
'A knight me gat, a lady bore,
I'm a squire of high renown.'

'ARE you an honest man?' said Billy, without preface.

'I hope so.'

'What is your name?'

'Trefusis.'

'A good name,' muttered Billy; 'and I suppose you're a great man in your own country,' he added.

'Only rich people are great now-a-days,' said the young fellow; 'and I am poor.'

'Poor men don't come kangaroo-hunting to the West,' said Billy, drily. 'Did you

come over to look for anybody?' he added suspiciously.

'That's my business,' said the Englishman.

'Blest if you ain't got just the hang of Cucumber Jack's way of talking,' said Billy, in a tone of disgust; 'I shouldn't wonder if you're his first cousin, or his son.'

'And who is Cucumber Jack?' said the young man.

'A darned aristocrat,' said Billy, with a fierceness that bespoke returning strength; 'and the father of that most beautiful, precious young creature who's perhaps catching your dinner at this very moment.'

'So that accounts for it,' exclaimed the Englishman.

'Accounts for what?' said Billy.

'Fifty things,' said the other. 'And where is Cucumber Jack now?'

'Dead, I hope,' said Billy, curtly; 'but

we're wasting time. Now look here, you've got us all into this mess, and the only way you can make up for it is by behaving honourably to *her*, just as you would to a white woman of your own class, and who'd got a father and brothers you'd got to answer to for her. And as man to man I ask you to treat her as you'd like any man to treat your sister (if you'd got one), if you gave her into his charge to go a long journey alone together.'

'Surely,' said the Englishman, warmly, and he held out his hand to Billy, who shook it hard, and exclaimed,—

'There's men that I'd as soon trust her to as an alligator—and for a downright worst sort of ruffian on earth commend me to a bad Englishman; but I like your face, and even if you go falling in love with each other, which the Lord forbid, you'll bear in mind your promise, and behave just as if the bush was a drawing-room, and the trees all ladies and gentlemen who'd got their

eyes on you. One eye in partic'lar,' added Billy, solemnly, 'being Sam's.'

'Who was Sam?' said the Englishman.

'Sam was an angel here below, who put his life down for her just as another man might have put down a sovereign when he'd got plenty,' said Billy, proudly, 'but up top he's watching over her still, and woe betide them as he finds trifling with the little 'un!'

'Do you wish me to take her to England?' said the young man.

'I do,' said Billy, promptly. 'Put her in a girls' school, or with a decent gentlewoman. There's enough gold dust in that bag (he pointed to the plethoric one lying by Yuntha's armoury) to fix her up handsomely with trimmings till I join her.'

The young Englishman thought of the sensation he would produce among his family and friends by appearing in the

character of guardian to this exquisite young aborigine, and looked grave. Here was Arcadia with a vengeance.

'Are you afraid?' cried Billy, fiercely. 'Can't you do as much as that for a girl who's risked her life, and lost her lover, all to keep the breath inside your body?'

'*Has* she lost him?' he exclaimed, startled, and realising for the first time, as Yuntha had just now done, the gravity of the issues his rashness had brought about.

'He's probably spear-meat by now,' said Billy, drily. 'He killed a man who spoke lightly of *her* (so the old gin told me), and the whole tribe's after him like a pack of hounds; but I wouldn't give much for her life or yours, if he overtook the pair of you. But, Lord, we're wasting time in talk, and this place ain't safe. You'll have to make a long night march of it by cross tracks, if you set a pin's value on your heads. And if I pull

through this bout, where shall I find you?' he added, abruptly.

'Army and Navy Club, Piccadilly,' said the Englishman; 'at least, they will give you my address there.'

'And you're going straight home?' said Billy; 'leastways, if you reach Bathurst?'

'Yes,' said the Englishman; 'I must be home by the first of January to keep an engagement.'

'Then you won't dawdle on the road,' said Billy, faintly; 'and now just you send her to me, for there's a word or two to be said between us.'

Yuntha came trembling, and put her arms about Billy's neck.

'Do not send us away,' she said; 'let us stay here till you are able to come too; we shall only draw pursuit on us by flight, and be overtaken.'

'Not if you go the way I tell you,' said Billy; and he gave her certain

minute instructions, that she easily understood, knowing the country so well. 'And now, my dear,' he added, tenderly, 'there's just a word more between us—between an elderly common man like me and a young maid like you who's got no mother to teach you, and only your own innocent heart to guide you in your ways and talk with a young man. And if he loves one of his own people, my dear, it will not beseem you to lose your love to him, and 'twill beseem you less to let him know you love him, being all alone together, and, so to speak, put upon your best behaviour; and there was never a man but liked backwardness in a woman, though to carry it too far might be provocatingness, which you must avoid, my dear, leastways, till you've got safe out of the bush.'

Yuntha blushed, laughed, and sighed all together. She had made her own resolve, yet could not check the curious

fear that rose in her breast, and made her dread to go forth on the long perilous journey before her.

'Call the Englishman,' said Billy, faintly; and he came at once.

'Good-bye,' said Billy, extending his hand, and looking earnestly at the other. 'I'll give you a call at the Army and Navy one of these days, and don't you forget you've got in your charge *Sam's Sweetheart.*'

'Good-bye,' said the Englishman, with a look that was better than speech; then shouldered the opossum rugs, and, taking the weapons in his left hand, held out his right to Yuntha.

'There's the gold-dust,' said Billy; but the Englishman shook his head; then, as an afterthought, picked up the bag.

'Pocket-money for school,' he said; but Yuntha did not hear him; she was clinging to Billy, and he it was who unlocked her brown arms, and with a great

effort guided her hand to the one outstretched.

'God bless and keep Sam's Sweetheart!' he said solemnly, as, with trembling lips, he kissed her forehead.

'God bless my own dear Billy!' said the girl, and kissed him back; then tottered a few steps away, and would have returned but for the firm clasp that drew her onward.

So, hand in hand, she, looking back often, and weeping bitterly as she went, they set forth together, and gradually the distance swallowed them up, and the trees closed upon them.

Alone, with only their own hearts to betray or protect them, Sam's Sweetheart and the Englishman had set out on that long, long journey of which neither might foresee the ending.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:
Printed by STRANGEWAYS & SONS, Tower Street, Upper St. Martin's Lane.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 October, 2018